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Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning

A STUDY IN HUMAN FREEDOM

BY

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Preface.
Of
Robert H. Krentel
In Memory of
Miss Isabel Sanford
10-23-46

PREFATORY NOTE

For the material on Wordsworth in this book I have borrowed with absolute freedom from a volume I published on Wordsworth a few years ago.

It is well nigh impossible for me to indicate my indebtedness to the many writers on the poets here treated. I shall only say that my indebtedness to them is great. For direct personal help in preparing and revising the manuscript, and reading proof, I wish to express my thanks to Professors I. N. Demmon and Louis A. Strauss of the University of Michigan.

S. F. G.

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INTRODUCTION

The spirit of freedom is a treasure of inestimable price to the human mind. Everywhere and at all times the love of freedom asserts itself—politically, socially, but most of all, individually. But our individual freedom, which underlies social and political freedom, has its roots directly in the will. And the experience of the will —the act of striking an attitude, of choosing an alternative, of meeting a situation with an undivided self, which gives a positive sense of freedom—this is the thing in us that is most distinctively and intimately human. Since this experience is human and universal, and since poets are wont to deal with things human and universal, it were strange if they did not reflect in their work a sense of will and a spirit of freedom. They do so, and they "awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense" of these qualities.

The poet's method of appealing to the sense of will is most often indirect, but if the poet be of a volitional type, as Wordsworth, or Browning, he sometimes appeals to it directly. When he does so, his poetry may impress us as declamatory rather than poetic. The objection, however, is not to the volitional appeal, but to the baldness of the method of expression. More often the appeal is veiled in metaphor, and may be finely poetic. For instance, the line,

"Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,"[1]

has often and justly been praised for the fineness and originality of the metaphor, while the simple beauty and superior power of the line just preceding it,

[1]Wordsworth, "Elegiac Stanzas."

"I love to see the look with which it braves,"

has been passed by unnoticed. Here the volitional appeal, veiled by the slight though exquisite figure expressed in *look* and *braves,* is poetic and effective. We are glad that the castle has a look with which it can brave the destroying elements. Its heroism unobtrusively takes hold of us, and the effect is bracing. Most often, however, the volitional appeal is wholly indirect, and lies in the texture and spirit of the poem as a whole, such a poem, for example, as the "Charge of the Light Brigade." It is because of this indirectness of the volitional appeal in poetry that comparatively little has been written about it in literary criticism.

Poetry is fundamentally the expression of personality, but the central and most important element in personality is the will. Where there is a weak and nerveless will there can be no strong and rich personality. Where there is a strong will and a noble soul, there personality abounds. The human will is beset with dangers—dangers, for instance, of imperiousness and sterility;—but when these dangers are avoided and the will acts normally, it embodies the noblest elements of the human mind and furnishes to us our deepest organ of response to the truth of things. In the "Prelude" and in the "Excursion" Wordsworth frequently attests to the sublimity of mind possessed by the poor and those in the common walks of life. The Leech-Gatherer in "Resolution and Independence" has neither knowledge nor culture, and is devoid of romantic feelings. What he does possess, however, is the power of self-sustenance, which flouts despair, which bears up against adversity, and which turns sorrow into pleasure and contentment. And Wordsworth could have laughed himself to scorn to find "in that de-

crepit man so firm a mind." Far more than we are conscious of, this firmness of mind resides at the core of human personality.*

It is certain that purely intellectual conceptions are of less importance to poetry than the energy of will. It has been said, for example, that "Paradise Lost" is a monument to dead ideas, and that it lacks human interest. The first part of this count may perhaps be accepted, but hardly the second. No doubt Milton's theological ideas, as ideas, are of little interest to us, but the vast volitional energy stored up in the poem makes it genuinely human. Its imaginative sublimity is the natural and harmonious outgrowth of a volitional personality. This poem is "the precious life-blood of a master spirit," the song of a man with sword begirt to do mighty battle, a man who, "with danger compassed round," sang with "mortal voice unchanged to hoarse or mute." The human interest in the poem lies in the indomitable energy of its creator's mind, and not in its intellectuality. The energy of will, closely bound up with personality, is a more vital force in poetry than intellectual conceptions.†

There are indefinable elements in the will; and since this is so it is impossible to give a complete or accurate definition of it. We can proceed with sufficient clearness, however, by considering what is, so to speak, the raw material of which it is made, and by giving a partial definition. The lower ground work of our will lies in our physical reflexes, our impulses and instincts, our sensations and crude perceptions, in the clash between converging physical desires, in the unformed subconscious tendencies

*See Note 1, Appendix.

†See Note 2, Appendix.

in us, vaguely pulling us hither and thither, in the occasional emergence into consciousness of this welter of unformed matter. This mass of experience furnishes the lower content and outer material for the will, and brings it to the very door of the outer and nonconscious world; yet this does not constitute the will itself. On a higher level the material of our will consists in the conflict of our desires other than the physical, in our higher aspirations and longings, in the conflict both of our passions and of our knowledge regarding things prudential, ethical, aesthetical, and religious. These things, again, do not constitute the will; they form the inner and higher material for the will. The will itself is an independent, self-directing, self-developing, but otherwise indefinable power in us—(it requires a pure act of believing and not at all of knowing to accept this statement)—which lies back of the things that have been described as the material upon which it works. This material is conditioned by heredity and environment, but behind it there is an increment of will, however small, that is absolutely independent of heredity and environment; else, where were the freedom? The will is the power "existent behind all laws," that makes laws, that selects and arranges and harmonizes our lower impulses and our higher aspirations, our passions and our knowledge; the power that organizes and unifies our personality. The will thus in its inmost circle ranges over the whole gamut of conscious life—from the physical to the transcendental, from the natural to the mystical, from the finite to the infinite, from the lowest physical desire to the highest and finest essence of spirit in us that can give rise to conscious aspirations.

But there are those who do not consider the will to have this self-directing and self-developing power, who

deny the freedom of the human will. Such hold that consciousness is a mere cerebration of cells, the product of a materialistic evolution, and that freedom, so-called, is an illusion, a product of man's foolish fancies. Poets, however, like religionists, almost unanimously take for granted the existence of man's freedom. They hold implicitly that there is in consciousness a power independent of heredity and environment, and that this power, deep in the heart of man, gives man, in all ages and under all circumstances, an everlasting assurance of freedom. However strongly St. Paul may, when his logical faculty is active, reason about predestination, it is quite evident that "whosoever will" is the watchword written over the whole face of the Hebrew scriptures, including for the most part the writings of St. Paul himself; and perhaps in the advice of Tennyson, at the close of the poem "De Profundis," that we should attempt to find

> Nearer and ever nearer Him, who wrought
> Not matter, nor the finite-infinite,
> But this main-miracle, that thou art thou,
> With power on thine own act and on the world—

perhaps in this advice there is an expression of what lies very close to the inner core of all high poetic truth. It is not for the poets to argue the theory of freedom; and Milton in "Paradise Lost" and Chaucer in "Troilus and Criseyde" make sorry work of it when they attempt the argument. But it is of inestimable importance to the poet's work that it hold implicitly the theory of freedom and awaken in us an intimate sense of the spirit of freedom.

The first and simplest reason why the poet usually assumes the principle of freedom in his work is that the assumption is implied in the conduct and in the practical

beliefs of all men. True poetry always has the roots of its growth imbedded in the soil of common experience. Poetry deals most generally with personal experience, and with the instincts, feelings, and volitions of men. Whatever else a great poetry may deal with, it deals first of all with the abiding and universal experiences of the heart and mind and soul—with the whole life of man. Life, it has been urged by various and competent critics, is the proper subject matter of poetry. But three-fourths of life, it has been said upon high authority, is made up of conduct. It may, however, be added that at least three-fourths of conduct consists in the proper exercise of the will. And thus the will—its exercise, its power, its freedom—is a good half of life. Nor is this by any means an overstatement of the will's importance in the every-day experience of living. It is an understatement rather. If the race is ever going to be saved, it must first strongly will to receive salvation. We are in a constant state of probation, and life is full of choices. We are forever at the parting ways—we can and must choose at every moment between alternatives, either great or small, momentous or trivial. We must choose between reading a book or taking a walk, between wearing an overcoat or carrying an umbrella, between vocation and vocation, truth and falsehood, idealism and pessimism, religion and no religion. Each choice closes up that which has been a possibility hitherto, but also opens up new possibilities. Now, poetry seizes, more powerfully than science or philosophy, upon this practical phase of life and renders it concretely, and thereby purifies and strengthens our powers of choice. Lear makes his choice imperiously at the opening of the play, and the consequences of it are mercilessly followed out through his whole career. The Satan of "Paradise Lost" makes of

necessity a virtue, declares it is better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven, and, by choosing and striving to attain this ideal and by exercising an unconquerable energy of will, gathers much glory unto himself. Certain it is that the assumption of the will's free choice has not merely a speculative interest for philosophers but has tremendous issues in the common affairs of life. And since the poet keeps his ear close to the throbbing heart of humanity he assumes, as human beings practically assume, the freedom of the will to be one of the fundamentally true things both in his faith and in his practice.

Another and higher reason—an artistic reason—why the poet does not find himself at variance with the principle of freedom but embraces it as the law of his life is that in the art of poetry, as in kindred arts, the highest function of the artist is creation, of "widening nature without going beyond it," of enlarging the sphere of life and freedom. We demand from the poet enough contact with the actual to make us sure we are on solid ground, but we also demand new idealizations and creations that seem to us reasonable and worth while. The miracle of the art is that while the poet makes us feel that he has both feet planted solidly on this earth and that he is dealing with the deepest verities of actual and concrete experience, the poet's pen at the same time

> Gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

This is what Macaulay calls "the art of employing words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination," and the truth that results is, for Macaulay, the "truth of madness."[2] As though the imagination were a

[2]Essay, "Milton."

faculty easy to be deceived, and as though all other kinds of truth except common sense truth were madness! No, the imagination sees straight, and the truth it finds is not the truth of madness but of creation. Poetry indeed produces an illusion, not on the imagination, but on common sense. Our common sense ideas find expression by means of our logical reason in forms other than poetry. Our feelings and volitions find expression by means of imaginative representation in poetry. And when, in reading poetry, we reach a certain imaginative intensity the imaginative representation seems illusory to the common sense element in us; but when with our imagination active we read a piece of scientific writing the work seems illusory to the imagination. The one strand in us may thus seem unreal to the other, and vice versa. Common sense is the truth of our habitual matter-of-fact reactions. Imaginative truth is the truth of unusual moments of insight and creation,—a divine inspiration, as Plato calls it. And in this highly imaginative and creative process the poet feels that he is in a world where creation is still going on and that he is a participant in the act itself. He feels what philosophers sometimes insist upon, namely, that the world itself is still in the process of making, as it has been ever since the beginning of time. The philosopher arrives at this idea by theorizing about it, while the poet, on the contrary, feels its truth as a thing in his immediate experience, to which his whole passional nature gives assent.

The poet's experience is something like that of the musician in Browning's "Abt Vogler," who finds (seventh stanza) there is in the moment of creation a will behind all laws that made the laws themselves, and that this gift of will has been given to man, who therefore can frame out of three sounds "not a fourth sound, but a star,"

that is, he can create. Each tone in our scale, he says, is a very common thing—"it is every where in the world," —but when this commonplace tone is taken and mixed with two in the musician's thought, there is produced an absolutely new thing—a creation! "Consider and bow the head!" In order to heighten the conception of his own art the musician contrasts his own achievement with that of the poet. His own art is above law, but the poet's is "all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws." On the basis of creation, however, the two arts are identical. And in their highest moments of inspiration we claim for the poets the same gift that Browning's musician claims—the gift of creation. Since the poet possesses this gift, he becomes conscious of the power of spiritual energy and spiritual freedom in the universe, of the fact that he himself possesses a will "existent behind all laws" that has the power to inform and to create. And he knows, therefore, in his own person the truth of the freedom of his will.

To state this truth in physiological terms, the poet in his higher inspirations and in the act of creation lives in that region of his brain that is plastic, as yet unformed —free. Here are not many obstructions in the way of pre-existent, habitual reflexes. Here is nothing of those few simple and treadmill operations of the mind characteristic of the matter-of-fact persons who seem not to know their capability of alternative choices. But here the mind, lifted as by inspiration above these treadmill operations, by one element of its power, perception, dips down into them and seizes upon common and matter-of-fact experience as a solid base upon which to rear its structure; and by the other element of its power, imagination, penetrates the cloudland of the unknown and flashes forth, by its own lightnings, unexpected vistas of hither-

to unknown and uncreated truth—truth charged with the thunder roll of new harmonies and new melodies. Thus the brain, drawing its material from two opposite poles of our experience. "adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed," shoots together new combinations of truth—sometimes ingenious, sometimes startling, sometimes with a vast economy and compression of experience, but always radiant with new born heavenly light and always drenched with the stuff reported by the senses, fresh from the world of fact and actuality. Here is God's plenty by way of evidence that the brain in its higher rounds is plastic and the will free. To doubt now is impertinence. It is only when the heavy-handed philosopher, for intellectual and logical reasons, demands that through a chain of causations each act must have had a sufficient preceding impingement, and that this impingement must have had a cause farther back, and so forth *ad infinitum,* that the question of freedom is at all attacked. When one's head is in an attitude to enjoy pure logic and is anxious for logic-chopping, it is always safe to take the side of determinism, predestination, and eternal necessity; but when one is in a practical frame of mind and takes counsel with the heart, one must insist on the freedom of the will. Thus according to the practical beliefs of all men and according to the deepest experience in his own personality, the poet finds the verification of his conviction that man is a free moral agent.

Now, what has this unique and indefinable power to do with the production of poetry? In the first place, if poetry is anything it is concrete and passionate. It is full of sensation and again sensation, full of sounds and sights. It has primitive freshness, flesh and blood qualities, oftentimes quite muscular and virile, at other times

delicate and sensitive—but always sensuous. On the other hand, poetry draws just as freely from the purely transcendental and spiritual qualities of our experiences, the highest and most refined of which we are capable. The things of sense which form its ground work become refined and are lifted up to a purified and lofty level. The body of sense, under the formative power of poetry, becomes, as it were, the temple of refined spirits. Now the power which draws these remote ends of our being together in a poem, which saves the things of sense from going the way of the world and transforms them into vessels fit to hold the precious essence of divinity, is the power of will. This, then, is what will has to do with the production of poetry. It is the power which penetrates, which restrains, which expands, and which elevates.

It may be urged, nevertheless, that however strongly a poet may believe in the freedom of the will, poets generally are notoriously weak in the exercise of their individual wills. It must at once be granted that in special cases there are some grounds for this objection. The case that comes to mind first of all as an illustration is that of Robert Burns — one of the most beautiful lyric singers in the world and the most wayward and weak-willed of the sons of men, it is said. There is indeed a considerable portion of his poetry that one might fairly wish otherwise and the failure of which one can trace directly to his weakness. But there are two things to be said on the point of the weakness—that poets more than other men are besieged by temptations of the sort to which Burns was a victim, and that the will in some men seems to work intermittently. We have just seen that sensuousness and passion are the outer materials with which the poet must deal. And if he is not especially gifted with the will to restrain, direct,

and control passion and sense, he is very liable to abuse them. But Robert Burns was determined to write poetry, and particularly ennobling and highly moral poetry. His will to write poetry was at most times quite steadfast. Long he pondered and often he improvised, and in the heart and will of him he was genuine. He was insistent on producing some good poetry for his country:

> Ev'n then a wish, (I mind its power),
> A wish that to my latest hour
> Shall strongly heave my breast;
> That I for poor auld Scotland's sake,
> Some usefu' plan, or beuk could make,
> Or sing a sang at least.[3]

In speaking of some favorite passages from Young and from Thomson, Burns says, "Though I have repeated them ten thousand times, still they rouse my manhood and steel my resolution like inspiration," and the thought of one of these passages is:

> What proves the hero truly great
> Is never, never to despair.[4]

The result of these aspirations, endeavors and resolves was high and pure poetry—the product indeed of a sturdy, determined will of a Scotchman, blessed with the gift of song. And yet his will sometimes faltered. There were indeed days and months continuously when the will unfalteringly carried the man forward in paths of virtue, self-restraint, and high achievement; but suddenly when the will was off guard and seemed strangely paralyzed and helpless, there came a vast inundation of passion flooding the life of the man into hopeless confusion and self-abasement. The senses were master. The mind

[3] "Answer to Verses Addressed to the Poet."
[4] Thomson and Mallet, "The Masque of Alfred."

succumbed to the power of the lowest material his hand wrought in. But the man repented, and rose again, and again there were days and months of high endeavor and the production of poetry instinct with will, energy, morality, and freedom.

The aberrations of will in Burns do not invalidate but rather confirm the statement that strong will power is an essential element in high and serious poetry. It is this power, on the one hand, that saves the feelings from sentimentality, that gives dignity and manliness to human life, and that

> Raises man aboon the brute
> And mak's him ken himsel';[5]

and the power, on the other hand, by which the artist draws his whole rich passional and spiritual nature within the scope of a single short poem or even into the expression of a single sententious phrase or line and makes us feel a peculiar tension of compression and charged energy that we are wont to call style. And though a few men like Burns reveal the anomaly of an unusually powerful will and of a will that seems diseased dwelling in the same breast, the steadfastness and lofty purpose of Milton, the singlemindedness and high endeavors of Wordsworth, the victorious war cry and death-defying spirit of Browning, and like qualities in a host of other poets, ought to shame us into silence regarding a few of their weaker brethren and ought to convince us of the vast importance to life and poetry of the freedom of the will and the sense of freedom in the lives of our poets.

But a second and more serious objection may be made to the importance here attached to this principle

[5] "The Tree of Liberty."

in poetry. It may be urged that poetry in particular demands spontaneity, naturalness and effortless flowing rather than conscious energy of will. And this objection leads us directly to the heart of our subject. An act of will is at one and the same time the most simple and the most inexplicable of all the characteristics of our mental life. To ask a man to choose between two alternatives offered him is to ask something that the simplest can understand. But to explain the act rationally when the choice is once made is as yet an impossibility and has thus far defied all science and philosophy. Yet, however inexplicable the act is, we all feel in our practical experience that we know precisely what it is to make choices, and we know that we are bound to go on making choices as long as we live. It is not enough that I will to be good or will to be true today. I must will the same today and tomorrow and always. It is not enough to will to write poetry today but it must be willed again and again. And the power of will when exerted, healthily and not narrowly, in one direction is the power to accumulate and increase will energy. The will gains strength by continued persistence in a thing; it gathers power and volume like a rolling snow ball. In poetry especially, the will, working in and through and by means of passion and imagination, does not grow sterile but remains healthy and flexible. And what is the spontaneity and the flowingness that critics speak of but the result of accumulated will energies suddenly unlocked under favorable circumstances? Does not the story of Burns, to which allusion has already been made—his willing to write poetry, his repeating favorite passages ten thousand times, his turning out poems while at the plow tail, his improvizations, his ponderings,—does not this story illustrate the true

nature of any product that may be called spontaneous and natural? Is not the poetry of Keats which is sensuous in a remarkable degree and which yet has, according to Matthew Arnold, flint and iron in it, an illustration of spontaneity and flowingness? "My heart is now made of iron" Keats writes to Fannie Brawne when he is in the midst of a poetic deliverance. The iron and flint is in him because he willed single-heartedly to see and to love "the principle of beauty in all things" and to set about in an iron-hearted fashion to realize his ideal. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is the iron in one's constitution that produces spontaneity in the thing to which one lays his hand; and conversely, the spontaneity required in poetry does not invalidate but rather confirms the statement that will power is one of the chiefest active faculties of the mind in the production of poetry.

To state the same truth somewhat differently, whenever the will acts forcibly in a single direction it puts into action subconscious and allied powers whose activities may finally surpass the will's own. This surplus of energy thus produced, like the overtones in music, tends to enrich the product, give it spontaneity, and cover up, so to speak, the original moving power itself. To give a simple illustration from personal experience, I have for a long time been planning to write this chapter. I have long and persistently held my mind to it against conflicting interests. For many days the hand refused to put down the words, but at last its work began. Since then at times the words have come in floods faster than the hand could put them down; and sometimes when I wished to stop the activity of forces thus set in motion, they persisted in spite of my efforts. Although the original conception of the chapter has been adhered

to, yet many unforeseen and subconscious forces have worked themselves in and have enlarged the context. And thus whatever spontaneity there is in a production, is either the result of previous persistent will efforts or of the under-current forces set in motion by those same efforts. Most of second-rate poetry no doubt can practically be accounted for in this way. Have given a person reasonably developed and intelligent as a human being and reasonably poetic by nature, and if he wills to produce poetry, wills to ponder the idea of it as Burns pondered it, there is no reason why he should not be a poet of no mean order. The whole lesson of Wordsworth's "Prelude" is that a poet's mind can be had for the making, although Wordsworth himself, to be sure, was more than a second-rate poet. There exists, at any rate, no contradiction between volitional energy and spontaneity as far as the making of poetry is concerned, but, on the contrary, the latter seems either a direct or an indirect result of the former.

There are, however, far greater things than spontaneity in great poetry, and the will has greater functions to fulfill. If the will in the commonest acts of life is an inexplicable power to us, it becomes ten times more inexplicable when we view its action in connection with higher experiences than the ordinary. No doubt the most important functon of the will is to surrender itself worthily to what it conceives a higher will. In hypnosis it is not the scatterbrain who is easily hypnotized but it is the one who can concentrate his mind upon a single spot of nothing and hold it there until it is numb enough to be subjected to the will of the experimenter. Likewise it requires a strong and unified will to make a complete self-surrender to a higher will, and to experience the joy of finding its own power enlarged and

enriched. But in this act of will there is involved the essence of mystery, indeed one may say of all mystery:

> Our wills are ours, we know not how;
> Our wills are ours, to make them thine.[6]

How our wills can become one with another power—whether that power be conceived as God, or Spirit of the Universe, or the Spirit of Beauty, or the Oversoul, or the Absolute—this is the question of questions, the mystery of mysteries. Thus the will—this most common of all our experiences—becomes the door through which we enter directly to the deepest mysteries of being. We need but to will to turn our faces toward the mysterious and inexplicable of life and imagine ourselves in some sort of union or communion with it to be made keenly conscious of the indefinable powers of personality and being. And this is precisely what a very large body of the greater sort of poetry attempts to do.

There are many minor poets and scientific and practical-minded thinkers who shut themselves for the most part away from the indefinable and inexplicable. Since it lies in the power of all men's wills to do so, it is a matter of their choice. They deal with emotions and ordinary concepts concretly and abstractly, with visible and conceptual objects, with demonstrable laws and possible intellectual attainments, but steadfastly refuse to follow anything that they consider chimerical. The ambitious poet, however, flies from sense matter directly to the incommunicable and the indefinable. Like Milton, the poet is content to soar with no middle flight in his adventurous song. He aspires to lay his hands

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[6]Tennyson, "In Memoriam," Prologue.

> On that golden key
> That opes the palace of eternity[7]

And, strangely enough, or rather naturally enough, the poet feels with more keenness than other men the presence of a power that disturbs him "with the joy of elevated thoughts," of a power not himself but wholly other than himself, of a will higher than his own which he has in all ages been in the habit of invoking to his aid. He is like Wordsworth who early in youth felt the power of poetry come upon him:

> I made no vows, but vows
> Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
> Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
> A dedicated Spirit.[8]

The poet is like the musician in "Abt Vogler" who felt that after he himself had done his best in rearing his structure the emulous powers of heaven yearned down to aid him. Novel and unexpected splendors seemed to burst forth and grow familiar and mingle with his own splendors; balls of blaze, meteor-moons, and wandering stars of heaven became one with the earth, obliterating for him time and space and the distinctions of higher and lower; and "there was no more near nor far"; there was a surrender of his will to the will of the infinite. Thus the poet feels in his own will the presence of the "Stern Lawgiver" that "wears the Godhead's most benignant grace" and that "preserves the stars from wrong."

Sometimes the poet is merely interested in this power empirically and describes a process of mind, as Wordsworth's description of the way in which he enters into

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[7] "Comus."

[8] "Prelude," Bk. IV.

union with and sees into the "life of things," in "Tintern Abbey," (lines 35 to 40); or as Shelley's most exquisite description of the way in which his mind long active in cognition finally became passive, and while in a trance, which was not a slumber, a vision was rolled in upon his brain:

> But I, whom thoughts which must remain untold
> Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem
> The cone of night, now they were laid asleep
> Stretched my faint limbs beneath the hoary stem
>
> Which an old chestnut flung athwart the steep
> Of a green Apennine: before me fled
> The night; behind me rose the day; the deep
>
> Was at my feet, and Heaven above my head,
> When a strange trance over my fancy grew
> Which was not slumber, for the shade it spread
>
> Was so transparent that the scene came thro'
> As clear as when a veil of light is drawn
> O'er evening hills they glimmer; and I knew
>
> That I had felt the freshness of that dawn,
> Bathed in the same cold dew my brow and hair,
> And sat as thus upon that slope of lawn
>
> Under the self same bough, and heard as there
> The birds, the fountains and the ocean hold
> Sweet talk in music thro' the enamoured air,
> And then a vision on my brain was rolled.*

Or as Carlyle's description, not in poetic measure but poetically, of the way in which his mind passed from an indifferent attitude to a positively assenting attitude toward the infinite God through the act of surrendering his will:—"Here, then, as I lay in that *center of indifference;* cast, doubtless by benignant upper Influence, into a healing sleep, the heavy dreams rolled gradually away, and I awoke to a new Heaven and a new Earth. The

*"The Triumph of Life."

first preliminary moral Act, Annihilation of Self (Selbsttödtung), had been happily accomplished; and my mind's eyes were now unsealed, and its hands ungyved." When his eyes are thus unsealed and he beholds the visible objects of nature, he puts the question, "What is Nature?" and answers:—"Why do I not name thee God? Art not thou the 'Living Garment of God?' O Heavens, is it, in very deed, He, then, that ever speaks through thee; that lives and loves in thee, that lives and loves in me? Fore-shadows, call them rather fore-splendours, of that Truth, and Beginning of Truths, fell mysteriously over my soul. Sweeter than Dayspring to the Shipwrecked in Nova Zembla; ah, like the mother's voice to her little child that strays bewildered, weeping, in unknown tumults; like soft streamings of celestial music to my too-exasperated heart, came that Evangel. The Universe is not dead and demoniacal, a charnel-house with spectres; but godlike, and my Father's!"[10] And it may be added that this, the moral act of self-surrender and the keen consciousness that personality pervades the universe, and that "through every star, through every grass-blade, and most through every Living Soul the glory of a present God still beams,"—that this is the essence of high poetry and of mystery.

The poets, however, do not merely give an empirical description of the way in which their minds enter into union with a higher power, but they attempt to render their conceptions of it in concrete forms. And as each poet differs somewhat from his fellows, each one in his own way has given a different report of what it means to him. He has bodied it forth concretely in a thousand forms. He has given the Uncreated a hab-

[10] "Sartor Resartus," Bk. II, Chap. IX.

itation and a name. Sometimes the dominant tendency in the rendering is theological, sometimes naturalistic, or moralistic, or pantheistic, or transcendental, or mystical, but always more or less transcendental and mystical. For the heart of both mysticism and transcendentalism lies in the intensity and power with which we will to face the mysterious and the indefinable within us and around us and in the intensity and power with which in the end we surrender ourselves to the mysterious and the indefinable.

There is a sort of criticism which identifies the transcendental and the mystical with the vague, and thinks it has condemned a poet when it shows that his poetry runs into transcendentalism and mysticism. This is rather loose and dubious criticism, to say the least. Of course, poetry must be passionate and concrete, but it ought also to be suggestive; and it is possible for it to be the most suggestive when it is the most concrete, the most inexhaustible and indefinable when it has the clearest definition. Even Shakespeare's great characters, naturalistic and overwhelmingly real as they are, possess inexhaustible and indefinable spiritual powers. Though they are overcome by fate, they impress us as havng free souls that are at one with the spiritual freedom of the universe. From such well-springs of spiritual freedom flow the powers of transcendentalism and mysticism, and in such a foutain-head great poetry has its source. Granting that a poetry remain sufficiently passionate and concrete, a true measure of its greatness is the measure of the depth with which it reveals the transcendental, the mystical, the indefinable and spiritual elements of being.

The purpose of this book is to study the poetry of Wordsworth, of Tennyson, and of Browning, respectively, from the points of view indicated in the preceding

pages. We shall see, first, how the power of will and the spirit and theory of freedom have entered into the making of their poetry; and secondly, how the surrender of their wills to a higher will led them into the region of the transcendental and the mystical, and how each characteristically bodied forth his vision of spiritual freedom and personality; and thirdly, what ethical and artistic estimates may be made of their respective performances from the point of view of our inquiry. The study is to be made in the light of a few fundamental characteristics of the times in which each lived—in the light of the action and reaction of the times upon the character and of the character upon the times.

CHAPTER I

WORDSWORTH AND HIS TIMES.

What then are the chief characteristics of the times and the vital qualities of character with which we must begin our study of Wordsworth? The times were chiefly revolutionary: men were making radical attempts to readjust society on a higher level, which produced widespread social unrest; and men were seeking greater personal liberty, which tended to emphasize the differences of personal opinion. This is not intended to be in any sense a complete statement of the characteristics of the times. One needs but to glance at the literature dealing with this period to see the futile attempts of writers to express in single phrases the forces then at work. Some of the phrases include so much that they are vague; others are so specific that they do not include enough. "A time of growing intolerance of antiquated and artificial forms," a time of "reaction against eighteenth century civilization," of a "return to nature," of "simplification," a time of the "recreation of mediaevalism," of the "rediscovery and vindication of the concrete," a time of "a sudden increase of the vital energy of the species," a time of "growth in the notion of the brotherhood of man," a time of "the strengthening of the national consciousness of the different nations of Europe,"

—all these are partial failures and partial successes; they fail to give an adequate conception of the times, they succeed in expressing some important aspect of them. The complexity of the forces then at work makes it well nigh impossible to express those forces in a single phrase. And our own statement claims only to point out such aspects of the times as have the most important bearing on the development of Wordsworth's experiences regarding the power of will and the principle of mysticism.

Yet the forces included in our statement are among the most permanent of the times. While many of the others, such as a "return to nature" and the "rediscovery and vindication of the concrete," have done their work, those included in our statement have still not spent their energy, even though a hundred years span the time between then and now. Our times are still revolutionary, only in a milder sense. Though our methods of work are different from those of a hundred years ago, we have not abated our zeal to readjust social conditions. Though we may not proclaim personal liberty as vehemently as men did of old, yet the divergence of the expression of personal opinion is greater than ever, and is ever widening. The times of Wordsworth initiated and gave a tremendous impetus to two forces that characterize the whole of the nineteenth century, the forces, namely, of increased efficiency and adjustment of organized society, and the widened powers and range of personal liberty.

The revolutionary forces of those days were by no means confined to the settlement and readjustment of political problems. They invaded all the departments of human affairs, even the affairs of practical religion. In a preface to a sonnet written in 1827, Wordsworth makes

this suggestive statement,—"Attendance at church on prayer-days, Wednesdays and Fridays and holidays, received a shock at the Revolution. It is now, however, happily reviving." The spirit of revolution was in the atmosphere, and it found its way into every nook and corner of town and hamlet:

> 'Twas in truth an hour
> Of universal ferment; mildest men
> Were agitated; and commotions, strife
> Of passion and opinion, filled the walls
> Of peaceful houses with unquiet sounds.[1]

Dominant in all the activities of the times was the note of an equilibrium less secure than in the period of time preceding, of an old anchorage breaking up, of maladjustments and instabilities, and at the same time, of promises and potencies of a slow but ever higher developement. By the shock of the Revolution, men were compelled to revert to first principles, to explore all natures in order to find the law that governs each. And when, in the presence of danger, a man sinks deeply into himself to discover the grounds upon which to think and act, he not only finds his own opinions to diverge from those of others, but he also gathers courage for his own convictions. Such was the experience of Wordsworth in the time of the Revolution. But while the insecure equilibrium and the maladjustments of the times encouraged and reinforced the expression of personal experience, they also tended to produce the excesses of individualism, false perspectives of life, wild theories, and unattainable ideals. They account in part, it has been alleged and rightly, for the incoherencies of Shelley and the terrific convulsions of Byron. But do they not also

[1] "Prelude," Bk. IX.

in part account for the "amazing inequalities" in Wordsworth that have been the wonder of critics from that day to this? It is the misfortune, or the fortune, of the great and the good to understand the burdens and the sorrows of a people and to bear those burdens and sorrows in their own hearts. (Is it not indeed by virtue of this sympathetic understanding and this burden-bearing that posterity gives them the title of great and good?) And when those burdens are exceptionally heavy and those sorrows profoundly deep, they leave their scars in the characters of even the greatest. As our theme unfolds, we shall watch the dramatic interplay of the spirit of the times and the character of the man until we arrive at the volitional and mystical attitude toward life that is at once characteristic of the man and a natural outcome of the troubled times in which he lived.

Since we have now before us the chief characteristics of the times, let us next consider the qualities of mind that were native to Wordsworth and that remained a personal possession with him through life. The powers that were given to him by nature and inheritance were the powers of passion wth extreme sensitiveness, and volition with a moral predisposition. Like our statement for the spirit of the times, this is not intended to be a complete formulation of all Wordsworth's excellent gifts of mind. Besides these, for example, he possessed an imagination that was not only "essentially scientific, and quite unlike the fancy that decorates and falsifies fact to gratify an idle mind with a sense of neatness and ingenuity," but an imagination that was penetrating and contemplative and that saw, in a very great measure, the "soul of truth in every part" of the objects of its vision. But this penetrating imagination in Wordsworth was peculiarly the product of the more elemental powers of

sensitiveness, passion, and volition. At any rate, it is the combination of these elemental powers which furnish the nucleus of his moral and intellectual being and give the key to his character.

In writing to a friend in 1792, the sister of Wordsworth says,—"William has .. a sort of violence of affection, if I may so term it, which demonstrates itself every moment of the day, when the objects of his affection are present with him, in a thousand almost imperceptible attentions to their wishes, in a sort of restless watchfulness which I know not how to describe, a tenderness that never sleeps."[2] With keen penetration she points out the basic elements in the character of her brother. "Restless watchfulness," "a tenderness that never sleeps," and "violence of affection" are the chief qualities of it. And this characterization accords remarkably with Wordsworth's description of his own childhood given to his intended biographer many years later. He says, "I was of a stiff, moody, violent temper." Allowing for some freedom in the use of terms, these characteristics may be respectively dignified (as, indeed, they were dignified in Wordsworth's manhood) into volition, sensitiveness, and passion. The stiffness of temper of his childhood grew into the "restless watchfulness" of his youth, and matured into that thoroughgoing volition which directed the events of his whole after-life; the moodiness of his childhood grew, under the forming agency of the will, into the "tenderness that never sleeps" of his youth, and flowered into that exquisite sensitiveness characteristic of his whole subsequent career; while the violent temper of his childhood grew into the "violent affections" of his youth, and, tempered by

[2]Taken from a letter quoted by Myers in "Wordsworth."

the influence of a masterful will, finally bore fruit a hundred fold in deep and thoroughly subdued literary passions.

Passion, sensitiveness, volition—these were the powers that were with him when a child hidden away among the silences of the Westmoreland hills, long before the terrible rumblings of the French Revolution broke upon his ears. Wordsworth attests to the possession of them in his childhood:

> I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.[3]

There were not only "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" with the child, but he was strangely sensitive to all objects. Before he was ten years old he would range through half the night among the mountain slopes and on the "open heights where woodcocks run along the smooth green turf," and would ply his anxious visitation:

> Sometimes it befell
> In these night wanderings, that a strong desire
> O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird
> Which was the captive of another's toil
> Became my prey; and when the deed was done
> I heard among the solitary hills
> Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
> Of undistinguishable motion, steps
> Almost as silent as the turf they trod.[4]

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[3] "Tintern Abbey."

[4] "Prelude," Bk. I.

This not only expresses the child's sensitiveness of mind, but also reveals the germ of a moral disposition. The silent steps, the sounds of undistinguishable motion, and the low breathings coming after him were due mainly to the deed he had committed. In speaking of a time before he was seventeen, he says:

> But let this
> Be not forgotten, that I still retained
> My first creative sensibility;
> That by the regular action of the world
> My soul was unsubdued.[5]

By his creative sensibility and by his strength of will he very early in youth kept his soul from being subdued "by the regular action of the world." And in the earliest of those days his strong will, similar to that of other boys with strong wills, manifested itself in the form of wilfulness and even stubbornness. His mother once told an intimate friend of hers that the only one of her five children about whose future life she was anxious was William, and that he would be remarkable either for good or for evil. But the force of moral conviction in his constitution was easily sufficient to save him from his mother's anxious fears and to give him not only the will to live, but to live morally, to realize the better alternative of his mother's prophecy, and become remarkable only for good.

These same powers of passion, sensitiveness, and volition were with him in his youth. If any further testimony than that of his sister, which is clear and unmistakable, is needed, it can be found in his early attitude toward the French Revolution. It especially illustrates his volitional activity. We all know how differently we

[5] "Prelude," Bk. II.

are affected by two characters, one of whom orders the activities of his life toward some definite end and always moves in a straight line when the direction is once chosen, and the other of whom is frequently at variance with himself and is easily turned from any course by accident or circumstance. The first impresses us as having, the latter as lacking, will and volition. Now, Wordsworth, whose temperament from childhood was somewhat "stiff," was very slow in choosing a direction of activity, but when it was once chosen, he held to it with a tenacity equalled by very few men. As the "Prelude" shows and as Myers in his book on Wordsworth has well demonstrated, Wordsworth for a time accepted the French Revolution as a matter of course, without being deeply stirred. But even after he was thoroughly aroused and his "inmost soul was agitated," and he could almost

> Have prayed that throughout earth upon all men.....
> The gift of tongues might fall, and power arrive
> From the four quarters of the winds to do
> For France, what without help she could not do,
> A work of honour—[6]

even then he was slow to throw himself into the cause. He checked and interrogated his emotions. It was his wont always to hold his emotions in restraint. He would not decide blindly, he would wait for light:

> A mind whose rest
> Is where it ought to be, in self restraint,
> In circumspection and simplicity,
> Falls rarely in entire discomfiture
> Below its aim, or meets with, from without
> A treachery that foils it or defeats.[7]

[6] "Prelude," Bk. X.
[7] "Prelude," Bk. X.

But finally, when he felt sure of the worthiness of the cause, he gave himself, not partly or stintingly, but wholeheartedly to it. He was then for France, out and out. Resolute and single-minded, he stood ready to serve her at any cost. What a shock then his moral and sensitive nature must have sustained when a little later his hopes for France were blasted! Wordsworth was a man who accepted great human issues seriously. He believed in what truth he possessed as few men believe in truth. And when once in his life he was compelled to witness the complete failure of his highest hopes, it was only by a slow and painful process that he readjusted himself to another course. Had his desire to see the truth victorious been less intense, had the issues at stake in France been taken to heart less seriously, had his will in the matter been less strong, he would have passed through the moral crisis with correspondingly greater ease. The deep impression this crisis made in his life is proof of Wordsworth's tenacity of mind and unexcelled volitional and moral temper in youth.

But these same powers of passion with sensitiveness, and volition with a moral predisposition, were with him in his mature years and manifest themselves in his best works. Though we cannot pluck the heart out of Wordsworth's mystery, it is quite certain that it lies in the direction of his wonderful sensitiveness to the simple and elemental forces of life, his insight into them, his firm grasp on them, and his power of compelling the reader to feel them, colored as they always are by his own moral disposition. The following familiar passage,

> I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,

> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things—[8]

does not primarily owe its strength and wonder to any new and original philosophical conception underlying it. The conception that there is a unified and living spirit back of all things and in and through all things is as old as the thinking race. But this passage owes its uniqueness and fame almost wholly to the mysterious vitality of volition. The power of it is due to the intimacy of the *presence,* to the fact that the presence disturbs one's inmost being. One is compelled to feel the motion and the spirit that impels all things. If there is any new philosophical conception here at all, it is the conception of vital movment—of attributing volition to the "goings-on of the universe." It should be remembered that the chief part of Wordsworth's definition of a poet makes him "a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them."[9] And this passage of poetry is an illustration of his definition. It deepens immeasurably one's sense of the sublime energies of volition—volition in the vast spaces of the universe without and in the heart and mind of man within. Wordsworth's grasp on the elemental passions and volitional energies of life was the grasp of a

[8] "Tintern Abbey."
[9] Preface to "Lyrical Ballads."

giant; and the passionate and volitional life that springs from his poetry gives that poetry its chief distinction.

There is also an undercurrent of motion in his poetry which gives it a peculiar distinction; it seems to be a sublimation of activity, but expressed with such a strong grasp on reality that its force is extremely effective. In the little poem, "She Was a Phantom" there is drawn a woman that is "a spirit, yet a woman too:"

> She was a Phantom of delight
> When first she gleamed upon my sight.

This character does not impress one with the qualities of color, concreteness, flesh and blood, and the like, for she is too phantom-like and sublimated to possess these qualites. But she impresses one with a very different kind of reality. She *gleams* upon one's sight. There is intensive movement inherent in

> Her household motions light and free,
> And steps of virgin liberty,

and the vitality of her motions is directly felt as a reality by the reader. She is

> A perfect Woman, nobly planned
> To warn, to comfort, and command.

She is at once the embodiment of spiritual sublimation and reality, and her power over us lies in the complete fusion of these two opposite forces in her character by means of the mysterious vitality and intensity of the poet's volition. *

In the great lyrical poetry of Wordsworth, then, there is not simply the purely lyrical strain which arises from a mood or a feeling, but there is in it a union of

*See Note 3, Appendix.

feeling and force, of mood and self-control, of emotion and volition.

And the will has two functions to fulfill in the production of Wordsworth's poetry. He himself says that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity; the emotion is contemplated, till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins and in a mood similar to this it is carried on." First, the will, by a species of reaction, whips a recollected emotion into a state of excitement, and then the overflow of the powerful emotion thus excited must be held under restraint as it enters into the making of a poetic composition. Though this theory for the production of poetry is by no means true for the production of all successful composition, it is certainly a careful and exact transcript of what took place in the conscious part of Wordsorth's own mind.

Since this is not merely the description of an intellectual process, but involves the activities of passion and volition as well as intellect, it offers an excellent insight into Wordsworth's whole nature and character. His was a life of continuous "high endeavors" at "plain living and high thinking," conscious and purposive. To everything he did he imparted a touch of volition. Even his "wise passiveness" requires a certain mental alertness that does not belong to a lazy man since it presupposes more or less conscious effort. In the early days of Wordsworthian criticism Aubrey De Vere, in an eloquent essay, showed that Wordsworth's nature was passionate. He says:—"The whole of Wordsworth's nature

was impassioned, body and spirit, intellect and imagination." What aroused the critic was the fact that since Wordsworth was so completely the master of his passions unsympathetic critics had alleged that he did not possess any. In Wordsworth's mature years the will always dominates the feelings. "There is volition and self-government in every line of his poetry," says Hutton, and there is likewise volition and self-government in every act of his life. It is with him as though there were a great underground reservoir of passion. But the reservoir is so deeply and firmly set in adamant that an explosion is impossible.

There is something of the wariness of a logician in Wordsworth's statement: "Had I been a writer of love-poetry it would have been natural for me to write with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles, and which might have been undesirable for the reader." Like the logician who is, more than others, conscious of the limitations of logic, Wordsworth the man of volitions and self-government is constantly aware of the limits of the power of self-control; and like the logician again who is forever dealing with matter that is refractory to logic, Wordsworth is always dealing with forces that lie just outside of his control, with intuitive impulses, with acts in which "we associate ideas in a state of excitement," with half conscious forces that are defiant to the subordination of the mind yet do not overwhelm its conscious self-possession. In close juxtaposition to a passage in the Fourth Book of the "Prelude," in which he emphasizes the independent, self-directing and creative power of the Soul, there is this passage, which tells of half-conscious influences to the finer influx of which his sensitive "mind lay open to a more exact and close communion:"

Around me from among the hazel leaves,
Now here, now there, moved by the straggling wind,
Came ever and anon a breath-like sound,
Quick as the pantings of the faithful dog,
The off and on companion of my walk;
And such, at times, believing them to be,
I turned my head to look if he were there;
Then into solemn thought I passed once more.

With the soul's subordination of powers like these—pervasive yet only half-conscious—Wordsworth was constantly dealing, but with the passion of love, which is sufficiently strong and self-conscious to require a degree of warmth in treatment that could hardly be approved by his principles, and which is likely to invade the power of self-control, he refused to deal directly. Though he acknowledged that

Love, blessed Love, is everywhere
The spirit of my song,[10]

yet he preferred to keep so far from the borderline of conflict between passionate love and self-control that he would always be absolutely sure of the supremacy of the latter. But he who would aspire to fathom the *depth* of the human soul and at the same time remain human-hearted, must also be willing to sound its *tumult*. Wordsworth, however, consistently refused to do the latter, which resulted not only in a distinct loss of human-heartedness, but also in the gain of a certain conscious self-mastery which is at once the source of both his weakness and his strength.

A precaution must be thrown out at this point. It is not here intended to convey the idea that Wordsworth's best and most characteristic poems were the product

[10] "The Poet and the Caged Turtledove."

wholly of self-directed effort and the "conscious conquests of insight." There is at bottom no contradiction in saying that there is volition and self-government in every line of his poetry and that at the same time nature not only gave him the matter of his best poems but also wrote his poems for him. For it may be conceived that a richly endowed mind may have a great variety of instinctive and spontaneous qualities and still possess a more than usual amount of self-consciousness and self-government. Self-possession and spontaneity are not mutually exclusive, but may both abound in a genius of a volitional type. This seems to be the truth in the case of Wordsworth. His strength, from this point of view, lies in the happy co-operation, at rare moments, of self-possession and spontaneity. This co-operation is so difficult to attain that we should not expect Wordsworth to attain to it always, but to fail at times, as indeed he does, on the side of spontaneity. How these unconscious and spontaneous elements are wrought into artistic structures we may never know from the very fact that they are unconscious and spontaneous. In his prefaces to his poems Wordsworth does not make enough allowance for the part they actually play in the makng of his poetry. But in those same prefaces, on the other hand, he gives the most accurate and profound description of what took place consciously in his own mind, and in so far the prefaces are invaluable, not only as a criticism of the conscious side of his art, but as giving us excellent insights into his character.

By the strenuous exercise of the power of passion and will Wordsworth developed an unusually strong spirit of personal liberty and acquired a complete mastery of his senses. When, in his mature years, he looked back over the passionate life of his childhood, he felt that

he had lived too much the life of the senses. He says in the "Prelude:"

> I speak in recollection of a time
> When the bodily eye, in every stage of life
> The most despotic of our senses, gained
> Such strength in *me* as often held my mind
> In absolute dominion.[11]

He very kindly and genially ascribes his mind's redemption from this thralldom to the powers of nature, and suggests that if he cared to enter upon abstruser argument, he could "unfold the means which nature studiously employs to thwart this tyranny." Whatever the agency by which this tyranny was thwarted, it is quite certain that by the time he was writing the "Prelude" his own mind had become a safe-guard against any such tyranny, and that too, without the agency of natural forces. Just as he resisted the power of passionate love to master his will, so he carefully guarded against the despotism of the senses and even looked back with a jealous eye upon their despotism in his childhood. He had now shaken off the domineering habit of the senses:

> I had known
> Too forcibly, too early in my life,
> Visitings of imaginative power
> For this to last: I shook the habit off
> Entirely and forever, and again
> In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,
> A sensitive being, a *creative* soul.[12]

And he had now become the example of his own text:

> Man, if he do but live within the light
> Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad
> His being armed with strength that cannot fail.[13]

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[11] "Prelude," Bk. XII.
[12] "Prelude," Bk. XII.
[13] "Prelude," Bk. IV.

With a mind that was sensitive and creative and that constantly lived in the light of high endeavors, Wordsworth had attained a high vantage ground from which to explore nature and human life. He was like a man on a high eminence over-looking a broad expanse of country. The slightest change of position presents views of objects remote from each other and varied in kind and nature. He was like the Solitary of his own "Excursion," who in the wilds of America,

> Having gained the top
> Of some commanding eminence, which yet
> Intruder ne'er beheld, he thence surveys
> Regions of wood and wide savannah, vast
> Expanse of unappropriated earth,
> With mind that sheds a light on what he sees;
> Free as the sun, and lonely as the sun,
> Pouring above his head its radiance down
> Upon a living and rejoicing world![14]

And thus, with a mind that shed light on what it saw and that was as free as the sun and oftentimes as lonely as the sun, Wordsworth had attained to a perfect self-mastery and to a large and glorious freedom.

We have now seen that the spirit of the times was revolutionary and that men attempted to readjust society on a higher level and sought greater personal liberty. We have also seen that Wordsworth possessed the powers of passion with extreme sensitiveness, and volition with a moral predisposition, and that by the exercise of these powers in a time of revolution and of liberty-seeking he attained to an excellent self-mastery and a glorious personal freedom.

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[14] "Excursion," Bk. III.

CHAPTER II

WORDSWORTH: MEMORY AND WILL.

I.

Wordsworth's theory of freedom accords with his strong sense of personal freedom in actual experience, which we have just described. As early as his first college vacation he had learned that the immortal soul has the God-like power to inform, to create, and to mould her environment:

> I had inward hopes
> And swellings of the spirit, was rapt and soothed,
> Conversed with promises, had glimmering views
> How life pervades the undecaying mind;
> How the immortal soul with God-like power
> Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep
> That time can lay upon her.[1]

He had also made careful observation of

> Those passages of life that give
> Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
> The mind is lord and master—outward sense
> The obedient servant of her will.[2]

And at a much later time, when writing the "Excursion," he observed that

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[1] "Prelude," Bk. IV.
[2] "Prelude," Bk. XII.

> Within the soul a faculty abides,
> That with interpositions, which would hide
> And darken, so can deal that they become
> Contingencies of pomp; and serve to exalt
> Her native brightness.[3]

This free power of the mind, he says, sets forth and magnifies virtue, and saves the soul "from palpable oppressions of despair." In the opening of the Ninth Book of the "Excursion" he says that this principle of freedom subsists in all things:

> Whate'er exists hath properties that spread
> Beyond itself;.....from link to link,
> It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.
> This is the freedom of the universe.

But he adds that "its most apparent home" is in the human mind. And when the outward facts of life—the fact, for example, that men, who in the morn of youth defied the elements, must vanish—seem to deny that freedom has its most apparent home in the human mind, we are still intuitively to "feel that we are greater than we know":

> Be it so!
> Enough, if something from our hands have power
> To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
> And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
> Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent dower
> We feel that we are greater than we know.[4]

The mind of man has the power to create and to inform; it is lord and master of outward sense, it can feel its faith in freedom, it can will to believe, and can go on forever living in the light of this faith. According to this philosophy knowledge is relegated to a second place.

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[3] "Excursion," Bk. IV.

[4] "After-thought."

Knowledge is great, but love, hope, faith, feeling, power of will, freedom—these are greater.

But just as freedom has its most apparent home in the human mind, so Wordsworth finds the human mind the best home for his poetry. By the power of his will, he focused his feelings and imagination with great intensity upon the life within, upon memory, instincts, perception, moral power, etc. Penetrating deep into his own heart he there found revealed the fact of God, immortality, and freedom.

Among these inner powers there is none that he dwells on more intensely than the power of memory; and from the extraordinary frequency with which allsuions are made to his childhood in his poetry it is quite evident that the memories of his childhood were one of the objects of his experience upon which his will focused his feelings and imagination. But from the fact that he scarcely ever alludes to the time of his life between his childhood and maturity that is so fraught with important issues in the formation of character, we are convinced that he took slight interest in "the naked recollection of that time." To be sure in the Books from the Third to the Sixth, inclusive, of the "Prelude," in which poem he deliberately sets out to trace the growth of a poetic mind from childhood to maturity there is considerable said about adolescence and maturing youth. But even here, especially in the Fourth and Fifth Books, he has a tendency often to slip back into the period of "our simple childhood," which "sits upon a throne that hath more power than all the elements." Again and again he returns to this point of view. Even in the Eighth Book, where according to the natural evolution of the poem he should have passed this period, he not only gives a long retrospective view of that time when nature was "prized

for her own sake" and became his joy, but he describes the quality of childhood fancies at great length. In the Twelfth and Thirteenth Books, where one would think surely he had done with the subject, he turns upon it more strongly than ever in his attempts to explain the mystery of imagination and taste. He exclaims,

> Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth
> Proceed thy honors. I am lost, but see
> In simple childhood something of the base
> On which thy greatness stands.[5]

In fact, with the exception of the Seventh Book, which is perhaps the dullest in the "Prelude," and the Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh Books, into which political considerations enter, the "Prelude" continually eddies about the idea of childhood and never really passes beyond it.

Outside his inner communings with himself and nature which he had begun in his childhood, Wordsworth has little to say about his college life and vacations that is instructive and inspiring. He says somewhat indifferently:

> Companionships,
> Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all.
> We sauntered, played, or rioted; we talked
> Unprofitable talk at morning hours;
> Drifted about along the streets and walks,
> Read lazily in trivial books, went forth
> To gallop through the country in blind zeal
> Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast
> Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars
> Come forth, perhaps without one quiet thought.[6]

It is highly instructive to contrast this allusion to sailing boisterously "on the breast of Cam" and letting the "stars

[5] "Prelude," Bk. XII.
[6] "Prelude," Bk. III.

come forth perhaps without one quiet thought," with the description in the First Book of the "Prelude" of sailing, when a boy, in an "elfin pinnace" which left

> Behind her still, on either side,
> Small circles glittering idly in the moon
> Until they melted all into one track
> Of sparkling light.

It was not only the boisterous sailing on the breast of Cam but the companionships, idle talk, trivial books, senseless horsemanship—these were all matters of indifference to him; and these indifferent things produced a sort of gap in the otherwise continuousness of his life. A link between his childhood and manhood was lost, which void gave rise to a sense of double consciousness:

> So wide appears
> The vacancy between me and those days
> Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
> That, musing on them, often do I seem
> Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
> And of some other Being.[1]

It is a simple fact of psychology that when any memory images are voluntarily recalled and are brooded over they become more vivid and lifelike than ordinary memory images, and can be made as vivid and lifelike as the images of immediate perception. It seems that Wordsworth, following somewhat the line of least resistance, voluntarily vivified the "remembrance of those long past hours" of childhood at the expense of the memories of adolescent years; and that as a consequence, the aggregate memories of childhood stood in his mind somewhat

[1] "Prelude" Bk. II.

apart from the images of immediate perception, so that he simultaneously felt conscious of himself and some other Being.

The fact, however, that Wordsworth voluntarily vivified the memories of childhood is not a fact of sufficient weight to account for this strangely divided consciousness. There is a deeper cause for it. There was another force that wrought in conjunction with his will toward the same end. That force was the great external fact of Wordsworth's late youth and early manhood, the fact, namely, of the French Revolution. During his adolescent years and up to the dawn of his interest in the Revolution, he was much given to introspective tendencies. In the parts of the "Prelude" relating to this period of time, are many passages that speak of the "reasonings of the mind turned inward." It was his wont to separate himself from his companions and allow his "mind to turn into herself." He early discovered that

> Caverns there were within my mind which sun
> Could never penetrate.[8]

But in early days of youth this tendency toward introspection may easily become abnormal, and there is a slight touch of the morbid in some of Wordsworth's youthful moodiness. There existed in his mind, he says, at this time,

> A treasonable growth
> Of indecisive judgements, that impared
> And shook the mind's simplicity.[9]

He slightly overstrained the instrument of introspection that was to do such effective work in later years. This

[8] "Prelude," Bk. III.
[9] "Prelude," Bk III.

excess, however, can easily be overlooked in the light of the fact that he now also perfected this instrument for future use.

But when, in his twenty-second year, Wordsworth became vitally alive to the agitation, the sorrow, and the terror of the Revolution, he was completely, though slowly, taken out of himself. His mind turned from within, outward:

> I gradually withdrew
> Into a noisier world, and thus ere long
> Became a patriot; and my heart was all
> Given to the people, and my love was theirs.[10]

And when later he was at the point of leaving France, he assures us that he would

> At this time with willing heart
> Have undertaken for a cause so great
> Service however dangerous.[11]

And the only reason why he did not perform this "service however dangerous" was that he was peremptorily called home by his guardians. His summons home, however, did not lessen his enthusiasm for the cause of the Revolution but rather heightened it. It is a common experience that a man's enthusiasm for a cause is heightened when his hands are tied so that he cannot play the part in it he has espoused in his heart.

Wordsworth had been at Orleans and had learned the local and national characteristics of the French. He had been at Blois and for three months had associated intimately with Beaupuy, who opened his mind to the real issues of the Revolution. He had seen the hunger-

[10] "Prelude," Bk. IX.
[11] "Prelude," Bk. X.

bitten girl and the heifer, which incident greatly enforced the arguments of Beaupuy that a benignant spirit was abroad to destroy such poverty; and Wordsworth's deepest chords of sympathy were touched. He had accepted the September massacres as a necessary violence during a revolution, for, as he explained a little later, "a time of revolution is not a season of true liberty." He had been in Paris and had "passed the prison where the unhappy Monarch lay," and that night in a high and lonely room he had felt most deeply in what world he was, what ground he trod on, and what air he breathed. He thought of the September massacres and of the Monarch in the prison, and conjured up similar scenes from "tragic fictions or true history." "And in this way," he says,

> I wrought upon myself,
> Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,
> To the whole city, "Sleep no more."[12]

He had clearly perceived that the forces at work in the Revolution did not arise in a day and were not the harvest of "popular government and equality;" but he clearly saw

> That neither these nor aught
> Of wild belief engrafted on their names
> By false philosophy had caused the woe,
> But a terrific reservoir of guilt
> And ignorance filled up from age to age,
> That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,
> But burst and spread in deluge through the land.[13]

What he did not perceive as clearly at this time was that it would take as many ages for the reservoir of guilt and ignorance to disappear as it had been in filling up from

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[12] "Prelude," Bk. X.
[13] "Prelude," Bk. X.

age to age. He had, on the contrary, looked for the immediate appearance of a new and glorious era of liberty.

He had also revolved in his mind "how much the destiny of man had still hung upon single persons;" and if perchance he himself were destined by providence to lead the people through the present crisis, he would not thwart the designs of providence, but would be ready for the sacrifice. Reluctantly indeed, then, did he obey the summons that called him back to England. When once at home, he was unable to act, but was given much time to meditate. Then it was that the full power and the spirit of the Revolution reverberated through his whole sensitive nature. His senses and feelings and moral being were as alive to the issues of the Revolution as they had ever been to the forces of nature. He was filled with the highest hopes and the most sanguine aspirations; but these hopes and aspirations were soon doomed to disappointment. It was only a few months after this that England declared war against the French Revolutionists, and Wordsworth's moral nature was given its first great shock:

> No shock
> Given to my moral nature had I known
> Down to that very moment; neither lapse
> Nor turn of sentiment that might be named
> A revolution, save at this one time;
> All else was progress on the self-same path
> On which, with a diversity of pace
> I had been travelling; this a stride at once
> Into another region.[14]

But the stride was not as swift as one would surmise from this passage. Wordsworth's affections for his native country and his native soil were of slow growth

[14] "Prelude" Bk. X.

and were deeply rooted. And slowly and painfully his alienation wrought itself into his character.

But a second shock was awaiting him. It came when the French Revolutionists took aggressive steps in subduing the efforts made for liberty in Switzerland. France herself was abandoning the cause of human liberty, and Wordsworth's sympathies were alienated:

> Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defense
> For one of conquest, losing sight of all
> Which they had struggled for.[18]

Cut off from sympathy with his own country and with the country whose cause he had espoused, he was thrown back into himself more violently and more completely than he had been taken out of himself. For a number of years his depression was as great as his hopes and aspirations had been high. Were all his aspirations for the relief of suffering humanity vain and foolish? Were there no grounds at all for the confidence he placed in human good? Was he, then, utterly wrong in his social and political ideals, and was life after all nothing but an empty mockery? These questions demanded answers. For Wordsworth there were just one method of finding answers to them and of escaping from his depression, the method, namely, of associating with the simple life and society of his early surroundings. Unfortunately this method was remote from his thoughts at first and he attempted another way of escape. He tried to find solace for his tempest-tossed soul in the speculative philosophies of his day:

> This was the time, when, all things tending fast
> To depravation, speculative schemes—
> That promised to abstract the hopes of Man

[18] "Prelude," Bk. XI.

> Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
> Forever in a purer element—
> Found ready welcome.[16]

But in that speculative scheming which promised to abstract the hopes of Man out of his feelings Wordsworth was wholly outside of his natural sphere. Perhaps none of the world's great geniuses have been more helpless than Wordsworth in mere abstract speculation. Here he was not only "out of the pale of love," his sentiment "soured and corrupted, upwards to the source," but he was really doing violence to his nature, his affections, and his powers. And the result of this prolonged experience was that he lost

> All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up moral questions in despair.[17]

This was the "soul's last and lowest ebb," and he turned for a time to the study of abstract science with the faint hope that his mind might be drawn away from the dark moral questions that had haunted it.

But now he had come to live with his sister, and her companionship, together with the surroundings of simple life and nature, began to be a healing balm to the wounds of his mind, and gradually, as by inches, he recovered from his depression. As the process went on, memories of his early childhood joys, sweet and strong, came trooping into his mind. Associations with familiar haunts of childhood vividly recalled many memories that had been these years slumbering but half consciously in his mind. In the presence of these new joys of childhood memo-

[16] "Prelude," Bk. XI.
[17] "Prelude," Bk. XI.

ries, the immediate past became almost a blank to him. His voluntary indifference to his college experiences and the tragic reaction of his interest in the Revolution wrought together to cut his life, as it were, in twain, and the days of his childhood stood out in bold relief from the rest of his life. They were now the only memories of the past that he could associate with all that he held most dear. Separated from him in point of time, they stood in his mind as an aggregate whole distinctly apart from his ideas and images of immediate perception. "So wide appears the vacancy between me and those days," it will be remembered the passage runs, "that often do I seem two consciousnesses, conscious of myself and of some other Being." What a unique and interesting bit of psychology is this when viewed in the right perspective!

Since the experiences of childhood were the only experiences that had not played him false he would cling to them as to life, and with that frugality of mind which loses no opportunities, he would turn them to the best account. So he cherished them and nurtured them all back to life, and they became to him a living reality. It is not to be wondered at, then, as he came back into the same surroundings and atmosphere in which he had spent his passionate life of childhood, and heard the same sounds and saw the same sights over again which he had seen and heard in those early days, that he would make one of his characters in a poem say:

> My eyes are dim with childish tears,
> My heart is idly stirred,
> For the same sound is in my ears
> Which in those days I heard:—[18]

[18] "The Fountain."

nor that in many another poem written soon after his recovery from the depression of the Revolution his mind would constantly slip back to the time of childhood, which he now believed held the key to the secret of the profoundest meanings of life:

> Our childhood sits,
> Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne
> That hath more power than all the elements.
> I guess not what this tells of Being past,
> Nor what it augurs of the life to come.[19]

It was in this way that the remembered instincts and intuitions of childhood were made to stand out distinctly in his consciousness and to furnish to his will a direct path to the eternal.

II.

Since Wordsworth's life of childhood was almost wholly a life of love for natural objects, his return to the memories of childhood was simultaneous with his returning interest in nature. Hence these two experiences of his are inextricably bound up with each other, and we only speak of them separately for the purpose of exposition. In his essay on Wordsworth's Ethics, Leslie Stephen says, "The great problem of life, that is, as he conceives it, is to secure continuity between the period at which we are guided by half-conscious instincts, and that in which man is able to supply the place of those primitive impulses by reasoned conviction. This is the

[19] "Prelude," Bk. V.

thought which comes over and over again in his deepest poems and round which all his teachings center." It would perhaps be more accurate to say that a great many poems written soon after his recovery from the depressing effects of the French Revolution, touch upon this idea; that in the light of the unfoldment of Wordsworth's character and the revolutionary times through which he had just passed, it was peculiarly necessary for him to attempt a unity of the two ends of his life that had been almost broken asunder; and that, instead of attempting to find a continuity between the instincts of childhood and the reason of man as such, Wordsworth, who had been thoroughly convinced of the absolute hollowness of rationalism and of all abstract speculation, was really attempting either to transcend reason or to level it down to the basis of childhood experiences themselves. Wordsworth was now wholly on the side of the intuitionists, and he would give no quarter to the rationalists. He carried the revolutionary method and spirit with him. Though he may have become a "lost leader" from the political point of view, he had no intentions of giving up revolutionary leadership in other fields. He fell back upon his personal experiences as a basis for operation. He believed that the experiences of his childhood were valid and he would dare to make the most of them.

Here Wordsworth comes into harmony with the movement in English Literature called the Romantic movement. The Romantic movement can in general be defined only in negative terms. If there was one quality, however, that all the leaders of the movement possessed, it was the insistence on the expression of liberty and personal experience. These experiences were as varied as the individuals engaged in the movement, and that is why the movement has no other important quality com-

mon to all its leaders. But this spirit of insistence on the expression of personal experience gave Wordsworth the courage of his convictions; and had it not been so, perhaps those strange and beautiful raptures of his childhood would have never been brought to light. It must not be supposed, however, that he was acting with a conscious gusto in the matter. He was being deeply moved by the spirit of his times, and his conscious will wrought in harmony with that spirit. He was in dead earnest. The robe of the prophet had now fallen upon him. He had become a mystic and a seer. He was now formulating his poetic principles both in prose and in verse. He had said that the poet, like the prophet, has "a sense that fits him to perceive objects unseen before." His mind ranged down the scale of thought to the instincts and impulses of childhood; it ranged up the scale through reasoning to a transcendental experience. And these two remote ends of experience, he felt, met in a harmony of truth in one's immediate experience of memory, or recollection. And so the memories of childhood, which had been rejected by the builders, became one of the foundation stones in his experiment of life.

These memories of childhood, then, were for Wordsworth no mere poetic imaginings, but they stood in his mind as a living reality. They were for him the source of joy, freedom, and intimations of immortality. In late years once, it is true, in a very scientific and unpoetic frame of mind, Wordsworth declared that in his childhood he was of a "stiff, moody, violent temper." No doubt this is scientifically and unpoetically accurate. But according to his theory now, there was beneath this moody and unbending self, another and deeper self in the child, not tainted with original sin but invested with glorious and heavenly attributes; and the experiences of

this deeper self of the child furnished the material for the will and memory to act upon. It cannot be stated too early that one of the characteristics of the mystic is that he insists upon the validity of immediate experience. Wordsworth, it will be remembered, said that an early emotion may be contemplated in tranquillity "till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind." His will, focusing his feelings upon some past experience, produces an emotion that does actually exist in the mind and has immediate validity. In this sense, a memory image or an imaginative picture is as valuable to the mind as an actual perceptive image. This is characteristic of much of Wordsworth's experience. Witness one of many examples that might be given:

> That very day,
> From a bare ridge we also first beheld
> Unveiled the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved
> To have a soulless image on the eye
> That had usurped upon a living thought
> That never more could be.[20]

The "living thought" is to be valued more than the "soulless image on the eye." The important point to seize is that a memory image is to be valued for its own sake. So, upon the most sacred experiences of his past, Wordsworth long and earnestly focused his feelings and imaginative thought until, around these experiences as a center, there irradiated a dome of light which he called the golden age, heaven, immortality. These glorified present memory experiences which had their concrete basis in

[20] "Prelude," Bk. VI.

childhood were what Wordsworth prized. They brought him joy, a deep sense of freedom, and intimations of immortality.

Immortality is at best a vague and shadowy thing for us here below. We can never do more than speculate about it on this side the grave. We can only have intimations of it. We can see it only, so to speak, through a key hole; and there are many key holes; and it matters little which we choose. Naturally we choose that which appeals most to our experiences. Wordsworth chose the key hole of his childhood experiences. Long and earnestly he peered through it into the shadowy and invisible world. Often he thought "of Eternity, of first, and last, and midst, and without end," and of "life, death, eternity! momentous themes;" and he could not guess what our childhood, our simple childhood "tells of Being past, nor what it augurs of the life to come." Joy, freedom, intimations of immortality—these are substantial results in the experiment of life. And since our childhood, which "sits upon a throne that hath more power than all the elements," is the substantial basis upon which they rest, the memories of childhood have absolute validity in Wordsworth's scheme of life.

On the question of the ultimate meaning and validity of Wordsworth's theory of childhood memories, critics differ. Because of the personal nature of the question, tempermental differences will enter into the opinions of those who judge. Perhaps the only point upon which there can be an agreement of opinion is that a number of passages, as, for instance, the eighth stanza of "Intimations of Immortality," taken singly cannot be accepted at their face value. They must be considered as polemical and exaggerated statements of a well enough defined principle that underlies them. The reason for these ex-

aggerations lies in Wordsworth's revolutionary zeal in opposing abstract speculation and logical reason, in his vigorous defence of a doctrine opposed to cold-hearted science, that "false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions." Not that he was opposed to scientific facts as facts. No one was a closer and more careful observer of the habits and conduct of animals, children, and mature human beings. But the whole energy of his mind was leveled against dry scientific and speculative systems; and in his fervor to state his own positive convictions, he fell into making exaggerated statements. Incident to these exaggerations, there is sometimes a lack of clearness to distinguish between childhood experiences and the memories of those experiences. When cleared of its exaggerations and its ambiguity, the doctrine is essentially a doctrine of recollection, which resolves itself really into the simplicity of a psychological method rather than the dignity of a philosophical system. The child is not really the philosopher, *in esse,* but is the philosopher, *in posse.* He possesses fresh and divine potencies which, if conserved and transmuted by the power of volition, will constitute the solid substance in the experience of the philosopher that is to be.

Reduced, then, to its normal proportions, what is the ultimate meaning and validity of this doctrine? Here it is that the widest difference of critical opinion prevails, and perhaps will always continue to prevail, due mainly to personal preferences. It all depends upon the point of view. To the hard-headed reasoner there is little in this doctrine that commends itself. He will insist that it must be submitted to the arbitrament of scientific fact. It is certain that in childhood there is a great deal of impotence. The perceptive faculties are not trained. The imagination is crude. Thought is embryonic. To

be sure, in childhood there is innocency and sweetness. But it is the innocency of ignorance and the sweetness of inexperience. Besides in some types of childhood, at least, there is plenty of anger, spiteful jealousies, wrangling, screaming, and getting red in the face. And it is precisely the memory of these sharp and thorny experiences that rankles in the mind in after years. True indeed is all this, Wordsworth would reply. He himself had visitings of those moodier hours. He had experienced all the manifest weaknesses of childhood. He would not write himself down a polished and philosophical little scholar. He would not put a false veneer on the facts. They are written large in the "Prelude," so that he that runs may read. But deeper and more vital facts than these Wordsworth also found in his childhood. His childhood, at bottom, he discovered was a wonderful compact of instincts and impulses that defied all analysis. There were gleams of light at opportune times. There were occasional flashes of insight into the life of things. His soul, like every other serious soul, had known its god-like hours:

> There's not a man
> That lives who hath not known his god-like hours,
> And feels not what an empire we inherit,
> As natural beings in the strength of Nature.[21]

It does not require the occult wisdom of a philosopher to distinguish between these higher moments of inspiration and the lower moods of sullenness. It lies within the power of every individual's will and memory to recreate the exalted moments of life until they are lived over again in the mind. This, then, may become a universal method of life and a panacea for its ills.

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[21] "Prelude" Bk. III.

There is, however, a still more serious objection to be made from the standpoint of scientific fact. Our perspective of childhood naturally tends to become untrue. There is a natural inclination in us to give additional colors to the joys and pleasures of the past. In his zeal to revive his memories of childhood experiences, Wordsworth did not guard against the possible deception that some of them might have been "called to life by after-meditation." And, therefore, he unconsciously drifted into an attitude toward his childhood experiences that is essentially unscientific and seems to be based on prejudice. To a disinterested person this natural inclination of the mind can easily be illustrated from experience. I remember the school-house in which I attended school as a child. It was the largest school-house in the neighborhood. To me it seemed spacious indeed. I always carried an idea of its spaciousness with me. Some years after I had left the school-house I came back to it. Then it appeared to me not spacious, but small and dingy. My memory image that I had carried with me these years was shattered. Most of our early memory images, if they could be tested likewise, would be shattered. From the scientific standpoint, then, Wordsworth seemed to take a prejudicial position, for he deliberately chose not to have his memory images shattered. But he would not, of course, defend this position from the standpoint of prejudice; he would defend it from the standpoint of subjective experience. He would not have the vision from within invaded and outdone by the outward facts of life:

> We have a vision of our own;
> Ah! why should we undo it?[22]

[22] "Yarrow Unvisited."

The immediate psychic entity in the form of a memory image was to him as valuable as the original experience from which that memory image took its rise. Though showing a reverent attitude toward the outward and verifiable facts of science, he showed a greater reverence for the immediate facts of consciousness. Whether an imaginative picture, or a memory image, or a transfused or interfused presence, the inner fact of consciousness held priority of validity in his mind. And at this point, Wordsworth, the mystic, parts company with those who insist on objective standards of scientific accuracy to decide what is true reality. It is exactly on these grounds of difference that critics are divided as to the ultimate value of Wordsworth's theory of childhood memories.

This same divergence, based on two widely different methods of approaching the problems of life, is manifested in the criticism on the famous "Ode on Intimations of Immortality." The conclusion, it may be argued, that there is a future life, is based on the hypothesis that heaven lies about us in our infancy, which latter hypothesis, being the major premise, ought to be an incontrovertible fact—a thing which most of us are quite unwilling to admit. Wordsworth reasons in a circle and there is no logical foundation for his thought. So says the man of logical thought and of scientific accuracy. On the other hand, it may be argued that in the immortal life which is a new state of existence, there may be a complete transcendence of our known order of time. Accordingly then, in eternity there is no such thing as time. Before and after, past and present, are terms not in the vocabulary of angels and the immortals.

This idea is presented more clearly in a passage in the Fourteenth Book of the "Prelude." One night after

a glorious vision from the top of a mountain in which Wordsworth says

> The Moon hung naked in a firmament
> Of azure without cloud, and at my feet
> Rested a silent sea of hoary mist—

after this vision had partially dissolved into air, it appeared to him the "type of a majestic intellect":

> There I beheld the emblem of a mind
> That feeds upon infinity, that broods
> Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
> Its voices issuing forth to silent light
> In one continuous stream.

And like unto this majestic intellect that feeds upon infinity and that broods over the dark abyss, are the higher minds of human beings when inspired, which minds live in a world of life,

> By sensible impressions not enthralled,
> But by their quickening impulse made more prompt
> To hold fit converse with the spiritual world,
> And with the generations of mankind
> Spread over time, past, present, and to come,
> Age after age., till Time shall be no more.

Just as time—past, present, and to come—is nothing to the inspired mind that can hold fit converse with the spiritual world, so our known order of time seems to be transcended in the Ode in which Wordsworth reached his highest point of inspiration. We have here, then, practically nothing to do with pre-existence and future life as such—it is simply one ever-present eternal state. And why should not the stray gleams of the pure white light of childhood intimate to us, as strongly as does any other phase of our experience, the life immortal?

Or, waiving the point of actual transcendence of time, and granting that the poem is of a sufficiently earthly mould to have remained within the regular mudane order of time, we can still maintain that Wordsworth's grounds are perfectly tenable from the intuitionist's or mystical standpoint. The fulcrum, so to speak, upon which the mind turns from pre-existence to the future life, is not the objective experience represented in the child, but the subjective immediate memory experience of the poet. From the standpoints of tone, feeling, motive, and meaning of the poem as a whole, the passage,

> O joy! that in our embers
> Is something that doth live—

is much more nearly at the core of it than the passage,

> Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.

In after years Wordsworth explained to his readers that he had used the theory of pre-existence merely as a device, making the best of it that he could as a poet.* Some have said that the explanation was due to the weakness of old age; it would be more fair perhaps to say that it was due to the sanity of old age. Leslie Stephen says Wordsworth took unnecessary pains in making the explanation. It may be so, but judging from the extraordinary proneness of human beings to clutch at something outward and objective, something away from themselves, as a basis for reasoning and faith, Wordsworth's admonition is not at all superfluous. He publicly said of the theory that "it is far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith, as more than an element in our instincts of immortality." But in spite of his disclaiming all rights to the theory, critics have again and again foisted

*See Note 4, Appendix.

it upon him as though there were something distinctly Wordsworthian in it.

In short, Wordsworth's theory of childhood memories has constantly been discussed as though the question of *origin* were the prime question to decide. Undoubtedly the whole trend of modern thought on the question of origin is to explain the marvellous illuminations that come to children as the reverberations of past life in its physical and psychical evolution. A modern scientist, Dr. G. Stanley Hall, who of all living men has perhaps collected the largest number of facts concerning childhood and adolescence, speaks like a poet, yet speaks with the authority of science when he says,—"Whatever soul-stuff may or may not be, it is most susceptible and responsive to all present influences, and also, in a yet far deeper sense, most pervaded with reverberations from an innumerable past;" and again,—"We are influenced in our deeper, more temperamental dispositions by the life-habits and codes of conduct of we know not what innumerable hosts of ancestors, which like a cloud of witnesses are present through our lives; and our souls are echo chambers in which their whispers reverberate."[28] No doubt the pre-existent theory must gradually give way to the more scientific theory. Nor does this latter theory in any way degrade the value and meaning of childhood memories. For the theory in question is influenced by a second trend of modern thought, the trend namely, to distinguish sharply between two kinds of judgments—existential and spiritual. The first is a judgment of origin, the second of value. Since these two judgments are independent of each other, the value of a thing cannot be determined by its origin, whether

[28] "Aolescence," Vol. II, Chap. X.

that origin be lowly or high. Whether the child is a product of a long physical and psychical evolutionary process, or whether its soul comes directly from a state of spiritual pre-existence, its present spiritual experience has precisely the same value. "By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots." And with this latter conception Wordsworth was thoroughly in harmony. Whatever we may believe about the origin of child life, and whatever Wordsworth may have believed, it was "a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit" in him as a child, and much more the sense of the volitional and indomitable spirit in him as a man, which he felt was free and which would not and could not die, that gave life and genuineness to the Ode. The fame of the Ode cannot rest on any judgment concerning the origin of child life.

Although Wordsworth was intellectually curious enough to wish to know the origin of life, his chief interest centered in the operations of his will and memory upon his childhood experiences, for the purpose of producing an immediate excitation in his mind. And, in the moment of inspiration, he joined the memories of instinctive and impulsive childhood with an experience that transcended reason and time. But this new experience defies any sensible and rational explanation, says the man of a scientific temper of mind. Be it so; and since it must be so, men of this temper of mind will always find in Wordsworth a rock of offense, after a certain point has been reached. They will find a permanent satisfaction in Jeffrey's and Macaulay's common sense way of dealing with Wordsworth. On the other hand, men whose temperaments are like that of Wordsworth will always rate the man and his doctrine of childhood memories extremely high. The intensity with which he focused his mind upon his childhood experiences, and the still

greater intensity with which he penetrated the mysterious truths of consciousness to which the memories of those experiences were an inlet, will be to these critics but a natural complement to his extraordinary grasp on the essential and fudamental facts of every day life, and to his power of extracting out of the very pain and sorrow and tumult of that life, deep pleasure, joy, and an abiding sense of spiritual freedom.

We have now seen that Wordsworth believed in the creative power and the freedom of the human mind, and that he resolutely turned his face toward the deep and the mysterious in man and the deep and the mysterious in the world. We have seen that he found a path directly to the eternal through the power of his will acting upon his childhood memories. We have also seen that the experiences of childhood that had value for him were those that were bound up with his interest in nature. We have had abundant proof that, in his effort of recollection to produce an intense excitation in his mind, there was present a deep strain of what is called the mystical. We are now prepared to take this principle of mysticism more fully into account.

CHAPTER III

WORDSWORTH: FREEDOM AND MYSTICISM.

I.

By the volitional intensity and the innerness of the experience of recollection, Wordsworth produced in himself a deep strain of the mystical. But when he connected outward sense perceptions to the memory of childhood experiences there was present a still deeper strain of the mystical; and when he attached a moral value to this double experience of memory and sense, as in "Tintern Abbey," the full tide of the mystical was on.

The general outline of thought in "Tintern Abbey" is as follows:—First, the picture of the mind is revived. The landscape, the plots of cottage-ground, the orchard-tufts, the groves and copses, the hedge rows, "little lines of sportive wood run wild," the pastoral farms, the wreathes of smoke,—all these beauteous forms, through a long absence, had not been to the poet as a landscape to a blind man's eye, but had frequently been partially revived in his mind. But now, as he stood in the very presence of the beauteous forms themselves, the memory of them was revived in full measure. Secondly, there is a development of immediate sense perceptions—perceptions of

> The meadows and the woods,
> And mountains; and of all that we behold

> From this green earth, of all the mighty world
> Of eye and ear,—both what they half create,
> And what perceive.

And thirdly, a moral value is given to this double experience of memory and sense perceptions. "Therefore am I," he says,

> Well pleased to recognize
> In nature and the language of the sense,
> The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
> The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
> Of all my moral being.

It will be remembered that in the crisis following his overwrought interest in the Revolution, Wordsworth considered that his soul had attained its "last and lowest ebb" when, "wearied out with contrarieties," he "yielded up moral questions in despair." But it is fair to ask whether Wordsworth actually gave up moral questions completely. It is to be suspected rather that his nature so imperatively demanded moral solace that he could not give up the moral problem at all. No doubt for a time he made conscious efforts to avoid the contrarieties of moral issues; but even "The Borderers," which was written in his despondency, is much greater as a study in the moral nature of man than as a play. He makes Marmaduke, the young hero of the play, say to Oswald, his tempter:

> Young as I am, I might go forth a teacher,
> And you should see how deeply I could reason
> Of love in all its shapes, beginnings, ends;
> Of moral qualities in their diverse aspects;
> Of actions, and their laws and tendencies.

And so Wordsworth really never ceased reasoning about love in all its shapes, of moral qualities, and of actions; and the poems written immediately after his recovery

are steeped in moral sentiment. In the poem "To my Sister" the mind is made to "drink at every pore the spirit of the season" and the heart to take its temper from the day, and both heart and mind are attuned to the highest law of morals—the law of love. In "Expostulation and Reply" the powers of nature—"this mighty sum of things forever speaking"—give energy and self-control to the mind that submits to them in a wise passiveness. And in "The Tables Turned" Nature blesses our hearts and minds with spontaneous wisdom and with truth. Thus these poems all possess an unmistakable moral temper, and the source of their strength lies in their extracting moral nurture from the "blessed power that rolls about, below, above," from drawing upon the "ready wealth" of nature and allowing her to be the teacher. It may be, as Morley would have it, that to some persons impulses from vernal woods cannot teach anything of moral evil or of good; but they greatly err who maintain that Wordsworth did not find this the prime source of moral strength. What happened to Wordsworth, then, is not that he gave up the consideration of moral questions, which was impossible to a nature like his, but that he ceased to look for moral strength in the social and political philosophies of his day. And, thrown back upon the dignity and strength of his own inner life, he revived the memories of childhood, joined them to outward sense perceptions, and in that double process, rediscovered himself—his moral nature.

From thenceforth those memory and sense impressions became the vehicle of expression for his inner moral life. It was through his reaction, therefore, on the French Revolution that Wordsworth's eyes were opened, and that his peculiar moral principles were formulated. And, carrying the revolutionary method and spirit with

him, he would teach men the new principles. He would readjust society on a new and simple basis, on the basis of the primal affections and moral strength derived through memory and sense from the powers of nature. Thus, with the intensity and whole-heartedness characteristic of Revolutionary leaders, Wordsworth became the prophet and leader of a new moral and revolutionary movement.

But this synthesis of memory images, sense perceptions, and a moral idea by a mind that is volitional and passionate, is eminently productive of a mystical state of mind. When the inner moral world, exalted under the influence of memory, is voluntarily drawn into unity with the outer world the mystical always results. The reason is that this activity of the mind produces a sense of innerness and intensity, and a sense of spiritual freedom; and these qualities are the life of mysticism. There are therefore some mystical tendencies in every human being; but they are more marked in some individuals than in others. In Wordsworth they were by nature unusually strong. The native powers of his mind—sensitiveness, passion, and volition—were well fitted to develop the mystical. In his earliest childhood, too, he unwittingly made elaborate preparations to bring on the mystical state.

Again, in some periods of history more than in others the spirit of the times favors the development of the mystical. The age of Pope, for example, with its aversion to passion, and to any union of the inner and the outer life, was decidedly unfavorable to its development. If, in that age, a young person were possessed by nature with strong mystical tendencies the spirit of the times would help him to hush them up, would deaden them for him, and finally destroy them. This is why no great

mystic appeared in the age of Pope. The age of Wordsworth, on the contrary, with its revolutionary tendencies, with its efforts at the readjustment of society in new and strange ways, with its insistence on personal freedom, and with its powerful emphasis on personal convictions, was emphatically favorable to the development of the mystical. What the spirit of the times did for Wordsworth was to encourage him to bring to light and to perfect the elaborate mystical practices of his childhood. In tracing their development, then, we must recur again to the experiences of his childhood.

One precaution, however, is necessary at this point. It is not profitable to trace this development closely in the sequence of time. For the mystical proper, that is, the pure mystical state, is not developed gradually in the mind and then permanently possessed. It is rather a state of mind that is arrived at occasionally, and held transitorily, and with irregular recurrence. It is altogether too intense and strained to be permanently possessed. What is more important, therefore, is to note in its development, the degree of intensity it has reached at any given point, and the different stages of its development marked by those degrees of intensity.

The simplest rudiment of mystical experience is based upon the most common experiences of humanity, and is developed out of them. It deals with

> Unshaped half-human thoughts
> Which solitary Nature feeds
> 'Mid summer storms or winter's ice.[1]

Strange, unshaped, half-human thoughts come to all of us and out of them the will builds its mystic temple. The

[1] "Peter Bell."

heart of the mystic, on the basis of common experience, tends to

> Luxuriate with indifferent things,
> Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones,
> And on the vacant air.[2]

The following characterization of Peter Bell is universally recognizable, yet it expresses such rigidity and fixedness of attention that it unmistakably possesses the rudiment of the mystical experience:

> There was a hardness in his cheek,
> There was a hardness in his eye,
> As if the man had fixed his face,
> In many a solitary place,
> Against the wind and open sky![3]

These passages represent the most common experiences, but they also possess the germ of the mystical consciousness, the suggestion of deeper strains of fixed attention. They represent the very beginnings of the mystical state of mind.

When, however, the kindliness that is wasted "on stocks and stones, and on the vacant air" becomes more intense, when the face that is fixed "in many a solitary place, against the wind and open sky" becomes more passionately fixed, then a higher and more distinct stage of the mystical presence is recognizable, and it becomes more clearly separated from other experiences. Not only did Wordsworth as a lover fix his eye upon the moon that descended to Lucy's cot, but when he came home from school on vacation and lay down in his accustomed bed he tells us with what fixedness he aforetimes had gazed upon the moon:

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[2] "Nutting."
[3] "Peter Bell."

That lowly bed whence I had heard the wind
Roar, and the rain beat hard; where I so oft
Had lain awake on summer nights to watch
The moon in splendour couched among the leaves
Of a tall ash, that near our cottage stood;
Had watched her with fixed eyes while to and fro
In the dark summit of the waving tree
She rocked with every impulse of the breeze.[4]

Even the grave of a dead companion is of sufficient interest to arouse the active but mute gazing tendency:

The grassy churchyard hangs
Upon a slope above the village school,
And through that churchyard when my way has led
On summer evenings, I believe that there
A long half hour together I have stood
Mute, looking at the grave in which he lies![5]

Not only do we learn that Wordsworth "gazed and gazed" at the daffodils, but often "gleams of sky and clouds and intermingling mountain tops, in one inseparable glory clad," bring on the rapt gaze:

On the fulgent spectacle
That neither passed away nor changed, I gazed
Enrapt.[6]

In the above passages the common qualities are volitional activity, fixed attention, and deep stirrings of the feelings. They are well on the way toward the distinctly mystical consciousness.

A representative passage of a more highly developed stage—a stage in which sense perceptions begin to pale in the intense light of memory and vision, and in which

[4] "Prelude," Bk. IV.
[5] "Prelude," Bk. V.
[6] "Prelude," Bk. X.

the moral and spiritual idea is present—is the following:

> I would stand,
> If the night blackened with a coming storm,
> Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are
> The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
> Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
> Thence did I drink the visionary power;
> And deem not profitless those fleeting moods
> Of shadowy exultation.[7]

And the reason why he listens so intensely and deems the exercise profitable is that the "soul retains an obscure sense of posssible sublimity," and that it is through such an exercise that the sense of its sublimity is heightened. Here memory, sense perceptions, and the moral idea are beautifully brought together. Likewise in the exquisite passage:

> Oh, then, the calm
> And dead still water lay upon my mind
> Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
> Never before so beautiful, sank down
> Into my heart, and held me like a dream![8]

In the following passage the light of sense goes out altogether under the volitional intensity of the inner gaze, and the outer world of reality becomes "an unsubstantial færy place:"

> And sate among the woods
> Alone upon some jutting eminence,
> At the first gleam of dawn-light, when the Vale,
> Yet slumbering, lay in utter solitude.....
> Oft in these moments such a holy calm
> Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes

[7] "Prelude," Bk. II.
[8] "Prelude," Bk. II.

> Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
> Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
> A prospect in the mind.[9]

And likewise in the passage,

> But to my conscious soul I now can say—
> "I recognize thy glory:" in such strength
> Of usurpation, when the light of sense
> Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
> The invisible world,—[10]

the light of sense goes out with a flash, and, in a flash, the invisible world, a new order of moral and spiritual truth, is revealed; physical sense is transcended, and we have duly arrived at the mystic's rapturous state of mind.

Just at the vanishing point of the senses is where the mystical proper, the pure mystical, begins. And the completest expression of the highest stage of it is found in a passage in "Tintern Abbey." To the beauteous forms that through a long absence had not been to him like a landscape to a blind man's eye, Wordsworth says he owed a gift of sublime aspect, the gift of

> That blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,—
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

[9] "Prelude," Bk. II.
[10] "Prelude," Bk. VI.

The critics have been loud in their praise of this famous passage. Stedman, for example, speaks of it as having been produced when Wordsworth's vision penetrated the quintessence of nature, and when he was "in his very highest mood." One wonders whether after the burden of the mystery and the heavy and the weary weight of all the unintelligible world is lightened, and after the motion of our human blood is almost suspended and we are laid asleep in body—whether then our being is in the proper condition to enter the very highest experience known to man. One wonders what actually is seen when "we see into the life of things." One naturally asks what are the fruits for life of such a rare experience. Wordsworth himself is wholly in doubt about the value of the experience and its consequent results, for he immediately adds:

> If this
> Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft.....
> How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
> O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods.

and we again suddenly find ourselves in an intelligible world.

In fact what has generally been considered contemplation *par excellence* is contemplation in excess. After having committed the excess, Wordsworth's essential sanity makes him retract immediately and take more easily tenable grounds. The passage, however, is a profound and delicate rendering of a possible and somewhat unusual mood. The description of the process by which the mind enters into this mood is delicately accurate. First the ordinary burdens of life are removed, and the mystery of the unintelligible world is lightened. That is, since there is no absoluteness but only relativity of knowledge of our ordinary life, that knowledge is renounced as an

unintelligible world of knowledge. Categories of thought are given up, all distinctions of grades and degrees are obliterated, and what remains is a sort of abstract mood without a concrete counterpart. Next the human blood, smelling entirely too much of earthiness, is suspended in its action, the body is laid asleep, and the soul, having transcended physical experience, enters into the "blessed consciousness of unutterable reality."

The result of this intense excitation of the mind is to produce two qualities of mysticism, namely, the noetic quality and the quality of ineffability. According to the first, "we see into the life of things." These states of mind are "states of insight into the depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance."[11] According to the second quality—ineffability—the experience in this state of mind remains inarticulate. "The subject immediately says that no adequate report of its contents can be given..... It cannot be imparted or transferred to others." For lack of a sufficient number of points of connection with ordinary life and of adequate terms of expression the mystic can never communicate to others the wonderful truths which he beholds.

To put the description of the process in other words, the necessary conditions for producing this extraordinary state of mind seem to be the the mental acts of forcing the feelings to divest themselves of their ordinary contents of concrete material and the imagination of its ordinary intellectual content, and to fix themselves upon some abstract point—which point in some mysterious way begins to illuminate under the focus of the feelings and the im-

[11] James, "Varieties of Religious Experience," in chapter on Mysticism.

agination. Under the strained conditions into which the will has forced the feelings and the imagination a new order of truth is generated by them, great gleams of light flash out in a thousand directions from the radiating centre, vast strata of wonderful truth are revealed. But when the illuminating process has once fairly set in, the will, which has been the chief power at work thus far, is temporarily held in abeyance, and for a short time the subject "sees into the life of things."

It is a long way from the point where the heart rather indifferently wastes "its kindliness on stocks and stones, and on the vacant air" to the point where its experience is so intense that it sees, or thinks it sees, "into the life of things." We have traced out a number of more or less distinct intermediary stages. We have seen that the very highest stage is for the most part a moral and intellectual abstraction; yet it always held a certain charm for Wordsworth:

> Mighty is the charm
> Of those abstractions to a mind beset
> With images and haunted by herself,
> And specially delightful unto me
> Was that clear synthesis built up aloft
> So gracefully.[12]

His mind, haunted as it was by concrete images, delighted to penetrate through the images and build up a clear synthesis aloft and gracefully out of the inner meanings and abstractions suggested by these images. Almost constantly, however, Wordsworth remained just below the very highest stage of the mystical. His method seems to have been to force his way as near to it as possible without losing the vitailty of passion and of concrete repre-

[12] "Prelude," Bk. VI.

sentation. Here, in the next to the highest stage of the mystical, where the light of sense does not quite go out, where ordinary intelligible distinctions remain, lies the most distinctive and the most solid part of his work. Here is where the synthesis of memory images, sense perceptions, and the moral idea, is most effectively made. It is on this level of the mystical that Wordsworth must be tested.

II

The power of volition, of self-control, which is true freedom, and the power of deep and intuitive feelings, feelings of love, faith, joy, rapture—these are the foundation stones of Wordsworth's mysticism. The union of these powers is the union of what is highest in man—self-control and freedom—and of what is best in child life—passionate love, faith, joy and rapture. Volition and self-control save the feelings from sentimentality. Thus Wordsworth attained to a high dignity of life and at the same time retained the simplicity of a child. Though the union of these powers can hardly attain to the name of a philosophic system of thought, yet the powers themselves are grounded deep in the common heart of man. They are little influenced by the accidents of time or place, or by the force of environment. It is for this reason that after a century (the nineteenth century) of prodigious efforts to lay bare the heart of nature and to discover her laws, of a vast collocation of facts concerning her, giving us new and profound insights into her mysterious workings, the treatment of her by Wordsworth is still fresh "with points of morning dew" and has lost scarcely any of

its meaning and vitality. With the grasp of a giant, Wordsworth seized upon the permanent and fundamental qualities of man, the qualities of volition and passion, at a point where man is not an object apart from the vast forces that surround him and play upon his life, but at a point where he is essentially in harmony with the forces that are constantly "breathing grandeur upon the humblest face of human life."

Why, then, should there be any question as to the meaning and validity of Wordsworth's mystical synthesis of memory images, sense perceptions, and the moral idea? The question of doubt is not usually raised with regard to the foundation upon which it rests,—although that may be questioned, too,—but with regard to the particular synthesis Wordsworth built on that foundation. Is the way of memory and the senses the true way of life? Does moral virtue really flow from the heart of external nature into the heart of man? Is not this synthesis of memory, sense, and the moral idea a factitious synthesis, and is it not true that the quicker we get rid of the illusion the better? Many great and wise men have been against Wordsworth on this score. We have seen in our study of childhood memories and the "Intimations of Immortality" that critics were temperamentally divided on the question of the validity of those memories. But here the temperamental differences are more highly accentuated. Here are represented two widely different ways of approaching some of the most important problems of life—the common sense way and the mystical way. The common sense way holds in contempt the intuitions, the dreams, and the raptures of the mystic. The mystic way seems to subvert into strange and interfusing presences the facts of every day life that ought to be taken as a matter of course. And perhaps between these two ways

of thinking, and especialy of feeling, no reconciliation can ever be made. The only thing that can be done is to show, with as much sympathy as possible, how far reasonableness will be on the side of Wordsworth's way of feeling about the important facts of life involved in his synthesis.

It has just been said that since the powers of volition and passion, which are made the ground work of Wordsworth's mysticism, are deeply grounded in the heart of man, they are not much influenced by the accidents of time or place, or by the force of environment. But not so with the particular synthesis he built on that ground work. That was due mainly to the accidents of his times and to his particular environment. Have given the man, his early surroundings, and the peculiar circumstances of his life, and the result must be this particular synthesis. Mysticism manifests itself in outward expression in many forms. Mysticism is intuitive, deeply subjective, close to the very inner core of life, to the very "beatings of the human heart." But it craves outward expression; and just because it is so deeply from within, its outward expression differs in different individuals. Men do not differ much in their statement of an outward fact of life, say, of the law of gravitation. It is objective and verifiable. But in the expression of an inner experience a man must recur to some form of pictorial or symbolic language. He must work by hints and suggestions; and the mystic experience on its way to outward expression may take diverse courses. Cathedrals, angels, seraphs, symbolism ready made from the Bible, may serve as a channel of expression for the different hierarchial stages of mystical excellence, as in Swedenborg. Nature may even be mystically interpreted in terms of Biblical symbols, as in Newman. In speaking of the angels, Newman

says, "Every breath of air and ray of light and heat, every beautiful prospect, is, as it were, the skirts of their garments, the waving of the robes of those whose faces see God."[18] And the Catholic Church, with its hierarchy of officers and its ritualistic forms of worship, may serve as an outward embodiment of the religious and mystical consciousness. So in Wordsworth, different from Swedenborg and from Newman respectively, the objects and powers of external nature furnished the embodiment and means of expression of his mystical and religious consciousness.

But the tone in which we have just been speaking of the mystics and their symbols is by no means the tone in which they themselves speak. The precise difficulty with them is that they take themselves and their symbols with absolute seriousness; and this is what alienates the critics. Swedenborg's religion to him is the true religion. Catholicism to Newman is the only right religion. And Wordsworth feels that he actually draws unbounded moral and religious strength from the heart of external nature. The synthesis stands in his mind as an absolute fact, and admits of no doubt. It is not the result of imagination so called, but of bare and unaided vision. Undoubtedly any and all of these mystics make too great claims for their particular formulas as means of the development of character and life. They are too insistent in making their particular cures the panacea for all ills. A specific formula cannot have universal validity. The method of each one, and of Wordsworth especially, is a little too exclusive. Moral strength does not flow so exclusively from external nature. Is it not possible that from the atmosphere enveloping religious ceremonies—

[18] "Apologia."

great cathedrals, elaborate rituals, accumulations of historic associations—moral strength may flow into the mind as effectively as from external nature? And is it not true that these systems need not be mutually exclusive? With these limitations in mind, let us see what may be said in favor of Wordsworth's mystical synthesis in particular.

First, we cannot really exclude the forces of nature from us if we will. Whatever transcendental qualities man may possess, he has evolved out of the very heart of nature, and is completely enveloped by her through his whole life. He is fortunate if he can live where he can tread the solid earth and can see the sky overhead. It is not disputed that men, for their moral as well as their physical well being, should live in wholesome sunshine and in the presence of blowing breezes a good part of their lives. These are the primal necessities of life, and just as Wordsworth in his poetry would use "a selection of language really used by men," so in the appropriation of primal necessities he would use a strictly selective process. He would not be blind to the destructive power of "the lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves," but he would select the best portion of natural influences. He would not all his life breathe the murky atmosphere of a great city, but would choose to let the "motions of delight that haunt the sides of the green hills" touch his life. He would allow the brooks, muttering "a busy noise by day, a quiet sound in the silent night," the waves and the groves, to play upon his life and mould his character. All this we must let Wordsworth himself tell in his own incomparable "selection of language really used by men":

> Ye motions of delight, that haunt the sides
> Of the green hills: ye breezes and soft airs,

Whose subtle intercourse with breathing flowers,
Feelingly watched, might teach Man's haughty race
How without injury to take, to give
Without offence; ye who, as if to show
The wondrous influence of power gently used,
Bend the complying heads of lordly pines,
And, with a touch, shift the stupendous clouds
Through the whole compass of the sky; ye brooks,
Muttering along the stones, a busy noise
By day, a quiet sound in silent night;
Ye waves, that out of the great deep steal forth
In a calm hour to kiss the pebbly shore,
Not mute, and then retire, fearing no storm;
And you, ye groves, whose ministry it is
To interpose the covert of your shades,
Even as a sleep, between the heart of man
And outward troubles, between man himself,
Not seldom, and his own uneasy heart:
Oh! that I had a music and a voice
Harmonious as your own, that I might tell
What ye have done for me.[14]

This indeed sounds beautifully mystical, but it may become a practical reality to any man. At least, no man is capable to judge what nature can or can not do for him until he has given her, at her best, a fair and reasonable chance.

(Secondly, it lies within the power of a man's will to make Wordsworth's mystical synthesis his own.) Although his method may not be exclusive of all others it will work if one but gives it a chance. If one put himself in the way of it, it will produce character of a high order. To start with, Wordsworth demands manliness, that is, humility and courage, of every individual. Then one must use his *will*—this is Wordsworth's peculiar lesson. One must will with mental alertness, not with men-

[14] "Prelude," Bk. XII.

tal laziness, to give himself up, not passively, but "in a *wise* passiveness" to the powers that are forever speaking. For the majority of human beings it is a very hard task to be wisely passive in the presence of great and enduring objects. It is vastly easier to engage in a constant round of aimless, nervous and scattered activities, which really is mere passiveness. There is, therefore, a wide difference between mere passivity and wise passiveness. And when that difference is taken fully into account, the combination of a moral idea and the life of the senses is not as factitious as it may seem.

In the third place, there is nothing degrading in the life of the senses themselves when under proper restraint. It is only when they are made an end in themselves that they are not elevating. It is not only the will that puts a restraint on the life of the senses, according to Wordsworth, but memory also has an important purifying power. The tone of much criticism on Wordsworth's interpretation of nature is as though he held that power of high morals comes only and immediately from and through the senses. This is essentially unfair to Wordsworth's interpretation. For the power of memory, as we have already seen, plays an important part in Wordsworth's scheme of things. It is not only what the eye and ear perceive but what they half-create that gives value to an experience with nature. And the half-creating power of the mind lies in previous experiences conserved and carried forward by means of memory and volition, and present in every act of the mind. "What want we?" he asks in the "Recluse":

> Have we not perpetual streams,
> Warm woods, and sunny hills, and fresh green fields,
> And mountains not less green, and flocks and herds,
> And thickets full of songsters, and the voice

Of lordly birds, an unexpected sound
Heard now and then from morn to latest eve,
Admonishing the man who walks below
Of solitude and silence in the sky?
These have we, and a thousand nooks of earth
Have also these, but nowhere else is found,
Nowhere (or is it fancy?) can be found
The one sensation that is here; 'tis here,
Here as it found its way into my heart
In childhood, here as it abides by day,
By night, here only; or in chosen minds
That take it with them hence, where'er they go,
—'Tis, but I cannot name it, 'tis the sense
Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
A blended holiness of earth and sky,
Something that makes this individual spot,
This small abiding-place of many men.
A termination, and a last retreat.
A center, come from wheresoe'er you will,
A whole without dependence or defect,
Made for itself, and happy in itself,
Perfect contentment, Unity entire.

The "one sensation" that found its way into Wordsworth's heart in childhood and that resides in chosen minds that take it with them wherever they go, possesses a power to purify and hallow the present life of the senses. And when "the sense of majesty, and beauty, and repose, a blended holiness of earth and sky" join with the power of memory, not only to purify and hallow, but to restrain and control the life of the senses—do we not have here a synthesis, mystical though it be, that commends itself to our sense of reason?

The final test, however, of Wordsworth's mysticism is the test of the foundation upon which its synthesis rests. It is "the mind of man," Wordsworth says, that is "my haunt, the main region of my song." The mystical experience, after all, is mainly a subjective experience,

whatever outward expressions and connections it may have. Wordsworth, says Emerson, "alone in his time, treated the human mind well, and with an absolute trust." And it was a trust in the mind's power of self-direction and self-support,—its power of will. We have already seen that in the production of poetry the will has two functions to fulfill—to reproduce by a species of reactions a former emotion and to hold under restraint the new emotion. In the process of life the will has still greater functions to fulfill. First of all by the doctrine of recollection, it is to conserve and transmute all that is valuable of former experiences. Secondly, it is to hold the eyes and ears, heart and mind, close to the bosom of mother earth:

> Long have I loved what I behold,
> The night that calms, the day that cheers;
> The common growth of mother earth
> Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,
> Her humblest mirth and tears.[15]

And thirdly, the heart must "watch and receive." Man is to "live within the light of high endeavors," and when he does so, he "daily spreads abroad his being armed with strength that can not fail."

But when the will does its work intensely and passionately, then, by the stress of feeling, the experience is carried along through the different mystic stages, and it becomes more and more subjective and intuitive, more and more inexplicable. And, like chemicals that will act and form new combinations after a certain intensity of heat has been reached, so the will and the passions, counteracting and re-enforcing each other, both strongly and highly wrought, beat out new combinations of high char-

[15] "Peter Bell."

acter. This is the ground work of Wordsworth's mystical synthesis, and it is solid ground work—as solid and enduring as the heart of man itself. Born of a time of revolution which stirred the vital energies and deepest personal convictions of men, it yet bears the stamp of an original and masterful mind. It is a truth arrived at not by the calculating and analytical methods of a philosopher, but by the demands of an intuitive and sensitive nature charged with volitional and moral earnestness. It is no doubt wrong to call this a system of philosophy—it is rather a method of practice in the fundamental terms of human life. It is when Wordsworth is dealing with this original stuff of human nature that he rises above the accidental influences of his times and identifies himself powerfully with those forces in men that are permanent and enduring,

> Their passions and their feelings, chiefly those
> Essential and eternal in the heart.[16]

It is here that he penetrates deepest into the heart of man and farthest into the mysteries of eternal being, and produces in the mind the most intimate sense of moral and spiritual freedom. It is here too that his utterances, in the words of Lowell, "have the bare sincerity, the absolute abstraction from time and place, the immunity from decay, that belong to the grand simplicities of the Bible."[17]

[16] "Excursion," Bk. I.

[17] Essay, "Wordsworth."

CHAPTER IV

WORDSWORTH: ART AND FREEDOM.

Wordsworth always and primarily had before him the purpose of writing poetry about man, nature, and childhood, however completely that purpose may have been obscured at times by social, political, or metaphysical interests. The poetry, to be sure, was to be philosophical poetry. It was to deal with new and original kinds of matter. It was to reform the tastes of readers and was to create a special taste for itself. It was to be an enduring kind of poetry and was to teach mankind enduring lessons. And, with these distracting interests, the only reason it proved to be genuine poetry is that Wordsworth was at bottom a genuine artist. We have seen that he, for the most part, renounced the purely mystical, that he dispensed with the pleasure of building charming abstractions through the concrete images of the outer world, and with seeing "into the life of things." We shall now see that he renounced the pleasure of the pure mystic because of artistic purposes, because his deepest impulse of life was the artistic impulse. "Faith," says E. Recejac, "identifies mind with its object in a way that artistic reflection can never do. When we reflect we find that we get the feeling of love, joy, being, from within, and then we picture them as belonging to all sorts of things: but in the mystic state, the consciousness and

the world meet directly in a world that transcends them both—in God who at once contains them and carries the sense of their affinities to the highest point. It is this meeting of the inner life of the spirit and the outer life which leaves behind every aesthetic effect."[1] In the purely mystic consciousness, then, the inner and outer life meet in such close affinity that the artist, who must work in concrete imagery, pictures, colors, etc., in order to be effective, cannot find expression for the purely mystical experience. The pure mystic may indeed be able to "see into the life of things," as he says, but it does not help the artist, for he has no way of representing what he sees, and, as has just been said, representation is essential to the artist.

Wordsworth, then, gave up for the most part the mighty charm of abstraction because he chose to be a poet primarily and not a mystic. But for this very same reason, namely, that he chose to be a poet, Wordsworth carried the mystic experience, by the intensity of will and passion, to as near the vanishing point of the senses as possible. Volition and high passion are not only the means by which character is beaten into shape, but they are essential to the production of great and enduring poetry. And in the last analysis it will be seen that, for Wordsworth, the chief function of childhood memories, sense perceptions, and the moral idea taken together, is to furnish material for purely artistic purposes.

Poetry may deal with common things and the common affairs of life, but it must deal with them more intensely than their commonness would suggest. Shakespeare, to use a familiar example, could deal with the common affairs of English life, but his great characters

[1] "The Bases of the Mystic Consciousness."

are filled with the mystery of power and with the intensity of high passion. Macbeth feels his heart knocking at his ribs and clutches at air-drawn daggers in his delirium. Othello is wrought upon by green-eyed jealousy until he is thrown into a trance. Hamlet is familiar with states of rapturous ecstacy. Lear, driven into the storm by the heinous wickedness of his daughters, is stirred to mountain peaks of passion. We do not call these experiences mystical because so many other elements—elements of mind derangement, which is permissible in drama, elements of acting and dramatic effects, etc.,—enter into them. But they have essentially the same source with the mystical experiences. Wordsworth believed the truth could be found in the commonest things right before one's eyes. But the penetration, the vision necessary to discover the truth there really created new values for them. Wordsworth wrote poems about common objects, but the poems do not especially have the element of commonness in them. His poems about children are not for children; they are for mature minds. His poems about peasants are not to be fully appreciated by peasants. The intensity of treatment removes the poems a great distance from the objects treated.

Again this intensity of treatment gave little chance for ornamental display. It made the language of his poetry as simple as that of common people. Wordsworth found when the holy passion was stirring that simple language would best express his feelings, just as Lady Macbeth, in the night walk scene, when she was charged with the greatest possible intensity, found (that is, the poet found for her,) simple language best suited to her purpose. To produce the greatest poetry, then, with common subjects, the poet must use power and intensity, and must express himself in the simplest language.

The chief question with Wordsworth, however, was how to carry this mystic and poetic intensity to the highest point without losing control of it and without losing the vitality of concrete representation. One aid to this end was the use he made of the material furnished by the memories of his childhood. These memories satisfy the requirements of realistic depiction, for they have their basis in concrete experience, in the personal experience of the poet himself. But they are not wholly dominated by the concrete. They are easily detached from time and place and lend themselves to romantic strangeness and to spiritual and mystic interpretation. Wordsworth's sincerity and realism prevented him from going outside of his personal experience for his poetic material, from entering a region as remote from the personal as that, say, of the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." But his desire for strangeness and wonder led him, so to speak, to the rim of his personal experience. The remote ends of the real and the mysterious met together in the memories of his childhood, which could readily be sublimated into a spiritual experience. Wordsworth, it may be said in passing, was in almost every respect the opposite of Scott. But in one respect they were alike, which likeness at the same time involves a contrast. They both lived much in the past. Scott's past was historic feudalism; Wordsworth's past was his own childhood. Scott saw the beautiful and ideal side of feudalism; Wordsworth saw the beautiful and ideal side of childhood. Each conceived his past in some sort of reality. Scott built a castle on the principle of feudalism; Wordsworth built a castle, too, with his inheritance of the past —a castle not made with hands.

But the perfect fusion of realism, spiritualization, and mystery into an artistic unity of intense power is a feat

beyond the strength of ordinary mortals. It requires a strict fidelity to the outward facts of life, a subtle and penetrating insight into their inward and intuitional meaning, and a voluntary intensity of mind which can be sustained alone by deep and genuine feelings. Although exhaustive treatment in the way of illustration can not be entered upon here, yet one illustration, which is at once the most beautiful and the most perfect, must be given. It is the poem "To the Cuckoo," a poem which Wordsworth himself placed first in merit among his shorter productions. The idea of mystery which pervades and underlies the whole poem is slightly suggested in the first stanza:

O blithe New-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice?

In the next stanza the mystery is more pronounced, and the situation and the immediate sense perceptions of the poem are given, but at the close of these stanzas there is again a suggestion of mystery slightly stronger than the first:

While I am lying on the grass
Thy twofold shout I hear,
From hill to hill it seems to pass,
At once far off, and near.

Though babbling only to the Vale,
Of sunshine and of flowers,
Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.

In the next stanza the mystery is more pronounced, and the "even yet" suggests that this impression of mystery had been experienced before:

Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring!
Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery.

And then suddenly the whole scene, as by magic, is thrown back to "those recollected hours that have the charm of visionary things," and romantic strangeness is added to mystery:

The same whom in my school-boy days
I listened to; that Cry
Which made me look a thousand ways,
In bush, and tree, and sky.

To seek thee did I often rove
Through woods and on the green;
And thou were still a hope, a love;
Still longed for, never seen.

And now the scene is suddenly brought back to the immediate present, producing that subjective transformation which the spell of childhood memories always wrought upon Wordsworth:

And I can listen to thee yet;
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, till I do beget
That golden time again.

And this potent charm of inward delight makes the ordinary outward world of reality fade into "an unsubstantial faery place:"

O blessed Bird! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place;
That is fit home for Thee.

This is perhaps the finest example of the perfect harmony of sense-perceptions, childhood memories, spiritualization, and mystery that can be found in the language. And it is chiefly the potencies of childhood memories and volitional penetration that deepen and vitalize the meaning of the ordinary cry of an ordinary bird, and create in the soul an inward light and joy and freedom of such intense reality that the outward world seems to float in a færy-like and unsubstantial substance.

Another essential aid in carrying the mystic intensity to a high point without going beyond the power of poetic representation, is to deal with primary and fundamental passions of human nature. The simple and most permanent passions of the heart are capable of being stretched farthest before breaking. Like the physical heart, they are so deeply inwrought into the very structure of our being that they continue beating faithfully as long as life lasts:

> There is a comfort in the strength of love;
> 'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
> Would overset the brain, or break the heart.[8]

In the "Affliction of Margaret," the subdued self-control of the character is matched only by the intensity of her feelings. The surface is calm, but there are stirrings to depths unfathomable:

> I look for ghosts; but none will force
> Their way to me: 'tis falsely said
> That there was ever intercourse
> Between the living and the dead;
> For, surely, then I should have sight
> Of him I wait for day and night,
> With love and longings infinite.

[8] "Michael."

My apprehensions come in crowds;
I dread the rustling of the grass;
The very shadows of the clouds
Have power to shake me as they pass:
I question things and do not find
One that will answer to my mind;
And all the world appears unkind.

Shakespeare's art was to create a storm of passions and then ride successfully on the waves. Wordsworth's art was to create deep undercurrent stirrings of the waters, but to retain a perfect calm on the surface.

Another essential aid in carrying the mystic intensity and rapture to a high point without passing into abstraction, was the investiture of the material universe with spirituality and movement. Everything for him, Wordsworth says in the "Prelude." "respired with inward meaning." Everything was transfused with a living spirit. All the objects of nature, great and small, remote and near—rocks and flowers and birds and trees, the very air we breathe, the very earth upon which we tread, the pageantry of earth and sky, "the broad ocean and the azure heavens spangled with kindred multitudes of stars" —all are, before our very eyes, transfused by the "blessed power that rolls about, below, above." We are made to feel that we ourselves are "rolled round in earth's diurnal course, with rocks, and stones, and trees." Charged with mystical intensity, but void of mystical excess, Wordsworth intensifies, with naturalness and spontaneity, the world round about us until it becomes a new world for us. He makes it a transfusing and animating presence that mingles with our works and pours its living spirit about us. This conception gives suppleness and mobility to the imagination and keeps it whole. And the

mystic intensity of it is thereby carried to a high point without losing the vitality of concreteness.

His method as the result of his artistic aim was productive of many artistic effects that are characteristically Wordsworthian. It led him, for example, to renounce the conventional language of the poets, to brand all extrinsic ornament as unnecessary and insincere, and to depend absolutely upon the concreteness of the thing he was talking about for poetic representation. He considered that every object, however minute, was itself sufficient for the stimulation of the senses. But by his intense penetration upon minute objects of life and nature he steeped those objects in a splendor not really their own and produced an original kind of idealization in his poetry. For extrinsic ornamentation commonly used by other poets he substituted visions of universal nature and the power of his own spirit. In a sonnet, for example, in which he addresses a brook he has these words:

> I would not do
> Like Grecian Artists, give thee human cheeks,
> Channels for tears; no Naiad should'st thou be—
> Have neither limbs, feet, feathers, joints nor hairs:
> It seems the Eternal Soul is clothed in thee
> With purer robes than those of flesh and blood,
> And hath bestowed on thee a safer good;
> Unwearied joy, and life without its cares.

In like manner the sweet and simple "Highland Girl" is identified with the spirit of her surroundings:

> Nor am I loth, though pleased at heart,
> Sweet Highland Girl! from thee to part;
> For I, methinks, till I grow old,
> As fair before me shall behold,
> As I do now, the cabin small,
> The lake, the bay, the waterfall;
> And Thee, the Spirit of them all!

In one of the "Lucy" poems he makes the Spirit of Nature say of Lucy:

"Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

"She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs;
And her's shall be the the breathing balm,
And her's the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

"The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her; for her the willows bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

"The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."

The brook, the tree, the child—small and common objects indeed—are thus seen simply but also intensely by the poet. And as a result of that simple and intense penetration the poet reflects in these objects visions of universal nature and the power of his own spirit. To particularize from the last of the illustrations just given, the child seen thus simply and intensely, suggests, not by way of comparison, but by means of the poet's direct seeing, pictorial

visions of floating clouds, bending willows, moving storms, midnight stars, and dancing rivulets, that subtly mould her life into shape; and the whole poem similarly suggests that the divine spirit of the poet himself interpenetrates that subtle power of nature which serves as law and impulse to kindle or restrain the child and which lends balm and grace and beauty to her spirit. This artistic method and aim, together with his use of childhood memories, with his firm grasp upon fundamental passions of hardy human characters, and with his attributing movement and moral power to the sense world in which we live, makes Wordsworth successful not only in carrying mystic intensity to its utmost in poetry but in giving us in his own poetry solid substance and actuality on the one hand, and, on the other, intense and highly wrought idealizations.

That Wordsworth always aims to produce idealizations he seems to deny in his "Elegiac Stanzas" on the death of his brother John. This denial, however, is made on the grounds of mysticism rather than on the grounds of poetry. It is due, no doubt, to Wordsworth's mystic earnestness in taking the world he has half-created as the world of absolute reality. We have seen, however, that the light of the pure mystic's faith is too intense for the attainment of artistic and poetic effects, and it is best to be somewhat skeptical, from the standpoint of the poet's art, after a certain point of intensity has been reached. Let us first get the poem itself before our minds. The poem was suggested by a picture of Peele Castle in a storm. The poet begins:

> I was thy neighbor once, thou rugged Pile!
> Four summer weeks I dwelt in sight of thee:
> I saw thee every day, and all the while
> Thy Form was sleeping on a glassy sea.

After telling in the next two stanzas "how perfect was the calm," he continues:

> Ah! then, if mine had been the Painter's hand
> To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,
> The light that never was, on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the Poet's dream;
>
> I would have planted thee, thou hoary Pile,
> Amid a world how different from this!
> Beside a sea that could not cease to smile;
> On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss.

The gleam of light that was to be added, it may be explained, was to be "borrowed from the youthful poet's dream." After telling how, in the fond illusion of his heart, he would have painted the picture, he says:

> So once it would have been,—'tis so no more;
> I have submitted to a new control;
> A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
> A deep distress hath humanized my Soul.

And in the conclusion:

> Farewell, farewell, the heart that lives alone,
> Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind!
> Such happiness, wherever it be known,
> Is to be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.
>
> But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
> And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
> Such sights, or worse, as are before me here,—
> Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

The point in the poem to seize is that henceforth to attain to happiness the poet means to present reality only, to welcome "frequent sights of what is to be borne." Since he has submitted to a new control, he means to paint pictures not as they might be, but as they are in

reality. He means to dispense with the poet's dream, and thereby, it is implied, with the power of idealization.

And this conception is in harmony with his definition of imagination in the Fourteenth Book of the "Prelude," which was written about the same time as the "Elegiac Stanzas." There he explains that imagination, in truth,

> Is but another name for absolute power
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
> And Reason in her most exalted mood.

And what he means by "Reason in her most exalted mood," it must be remembered, is passion. This he explains in the Fifth Book of the "Prelude," where he speaks of

> Adamantine holds of truth
> By reason built, or passion, which itself
> Is highest reason in a soul sublime.

We have, then, in volition which is "absolute power," in passion which "itself is highest reason," and in insight which is sensitive and sympathetic vision—in these we have the ingredients of the imagination. And this, it may be added, is, for all practical purposes, an accurate description of the conscious elements of Wordsworth's imagination. And we have noted in an earlier chapter, it is peculiarly true of Wordsworth that his imagination is the product of the elemental powers of volition, passion, and sensitiveness.

The chief point of interest for us here, however, is that this conception of the imagination has its limitations, that when the poet tries to substitute what he feels to be the facts of absolute reality for imagination he goes beyond the limits of the power of poetic representation. It is all very well for a mystic who sees the absolute facts of reality in his symbols or even in a deep

distress that has humanized his soul, to disparage the poet's imagination that is "housed in a dream" and that loves to build an ideal castle

> Beside a sea that could not cease to smile;
> On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss.

But the mystic's sense of absolute reality, carried to its logical sequence, places the poet's art in a false light. For, in his substitution of the supposed facts of absolute reality for imagination, he encroaches upon and limits the poet's power of idealization and creation. The poet can never avoid being a creator, for that is his highest function. He is no doubt to try to see things as they are, but it is equally important that he should create new values for those things, and the mystic's ideal of absolute reality is an impossibility in a world where creation is going on. Are not the "Elegiac Stanzas" themselves, from the artistic standpoint, a refutation of the mystic's theory? Let us place side by side two stanzas from the poem, one from the earlier part, in which he tells how he once *would have* painted the picture, and one from the latter part where the picture is given *in reality*:

> A Picture had it been of lasting ease,
> Elysian quiet, without toil or strife;
> No motion but the moving tide, a breeze,
> Or merely silent Nature's breathing life.
> * * * * *
> And this huge Castle, standing here sublime,
> I love to see the look with which it braves,
> Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
> The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves.

Are not both of these stanzas creations? Do they not both have the added gleam, the "consecration and the poet's dream?" And does not the first possess as much reality as the latter, and is it not just as legitimate as a

poetic creation? Wordsworth's poetic art defies his mystic theory; and though in theory he was often a pure mystic, in practice he was a genine creative artist. The poet in him prevailed over the mystic. But the conflict and the renuciations which it brought with it were boundlessly fruitful. For out of the struggle between the mystic, who by the intensity of pure vision would have his "eye on his object" and would see "into the life of things," and the poet, who, bound by his art, must find words and concrete imagery in which to express his thoughts, there was born a synthesis of the actual and the ideal, of solid substance and idealization, that led the poet a long way toward, yet somewhat on the hither side, of absolute truth and absolute reality.

In the Second Book of the "Prelude," which was written considerably earlier than the Fourteenth and the "Elegiac Stanzas," Wordsworth, in tracing the growth of his poetic mind, gives a less mystical and a more just account of the poet's idealizing power:

> An auxiliar light
> Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
> Bestowed new splendour: the melodious birds,
> The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on
> Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
> A like dominion, and the midnight storm
> Grew darker in the presence of my eye:
> Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
> And hence my transport.

Here the eye is on the object and it also idealizes the object. This is in accordance with the facts of realistic depiction and poetic creation, together with the power of intensifying by mystical vision.

The power of the mind by which this unity of ideality and actuality is effected is penetration, or vision. The

measure of the mind's power is the measure of the tension we feel resulting from the attempt to express the universal in the particular, the ideal in the actual. The whole history of Wordsworth's literary life may be summed up as a constant and persistent endeavor to substitute this power of vision for imagination as ordinarily conceived, to put himself at once at the center of eternal being and at the center of his own life, and to make those centers, not imaginatively but actually, identical. To attain this end completely, however, is an impossibility forever, for it is always by a leap of imagination that the final identity is made. Perhaps in the "Ode to Duty" more nearly than anywhere else, Wordsworth attained to this identity by pure vision, as, for example, in the following eight lines where he draws the power of the inner and personal life into identity with the "Stern lawgiver" of the outer world:

> Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
> And fragrance in thy footing treads;
> Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
> And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong.
>
> To humbler functions, awful Power!
> I call thee: I myself commend
> Unto thy guidance from this hour;
> Oh, let my weakness have an end!

But even in these lines the transition from the thought in the first four to that in the last four is made by a leap of the imagination. Thus the very last step in the attempt at any such identity is an imaginative step, and the result obtained is the result almost, but not wholly, of pure vision. Yet it is precisely by such an aim (even though it is not ideally attainable) and by such an intensely mys-

tical conception of existence that in his poetry Wordsworth, with penetration and power, has drawn together sense and soul, body and spirit, earth and heaven, has given us solid substance and intense idealizations, has made us deeply aware of the mind's forces of moral and spiritual Freedom, and has won the distinction of depending more than any other poet on the power of unaided vision—the power of volitional penetration.

CHAPTER V

TENNYSON AND HIS TIMES.

In the annals of English Literature Tennyson has not only been Wordsworth's most natural mystical successor but his greatest successor as a theorizer on the principle of free-will. But this likeness, of course, involves deep and serious contrasts. Wordsworth, for example, gave us poetry charged with mystical intensity, while Tennyson for the most part described objectively some of our mystical qualities. Wordsworth exercised in his "high endeavors" the power of free-will concretely, while Tennyson theorized about free-will poetically. Although Tennyson was never able to penetrate behind the veil as far as Wordsworth and victoriously render a reason as a man who had seen with his own eyes the splendor and grandeur of the eternities, yet the man who could write—

> Moreover, something is or seems,
> That touches me with mystic gleams,
> Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—
>
> Of something felt, like something here;
> Of something done, I know not where;
> Such as no language may declare—[1]

possessed a sweetness and grace, a flexibility of mind that could adjust itself to a variety of impressions, which was denied his more strenuous and giant-like elder brother.

[1] "The Two Voices."

And although Tennyson could never draw God, the moral law, and the power of free-will into a union with as strong a hand as Wordsworth has done in the "Ode to Duty," yet his statement of the same truth—

> But curb the beast would cast thee in the mire,
> And leave the hot swamp of voluptuousness,
> A cloud between the Nameless and thyself,
> And lay thine uphill shoulder to the wheel,
> And climb the Mount of Blessing—[2]

cleaves a pathway directly to the Mount of Blessing by means of the will with subtle clearness and remarkable poetic fidelity. The thing to say is not that one man was superior or inferior to the other, (except, of course, when specific and definite points of view are given) but that they are widely different. The difference between Wordsworth and Tennyson is to be measured alone by the difference of two separate periods of time and by two very different personalities. What, then, are the chief characteristics of the times and the vital qualities of character with which we must begin our study of Tennyson?

To find a brief statement of the characteristics of the age which mark the formative years of Tennyson's life seems, at first sight at least, impossible. It may be contended that if there ever has been an age in human history marked by diversity and variety of tendencies and movements it was the age of Tennyson. It was an age of insistence on personal freedom, individuality, self-realization, specialization—resulting in endless varieties of individual views,—an age of free scientific investigation, of discovery, of the application of discovered truth to practical life problems, hence an age of reconstruction, of breaking up traditions and fixed customs, an age of re-

[2] "The Ancient Sage."

adjustment in politics, morals, religion, society; it was also an age of bold speculation, ranging from the lowest materialism to the purest transcendentalism, an age of new imaginative flights, of "Sartor Resartuses" and "In Memoriams" and Rabbi Ben Ezras"—how shall we put all this and much more in any comprehensible statement or give any adequate description of it? There may be some truth indeed in the contention that in the development of the human race—in its movement forward to that "Far off divine" event to which our poet has destined it,—the wonderful nineteenth century marks the period when, in the diversity of individual demands and achievements, the spirit of the times has become so subtle, complex, and diversified that it will always be impossible to sum up its chief characteristics. What will be true more likely, however, is that, in a century or two hence when the dust and smoke of the nineteenth century shall have cleared away and men shall have been able to attain a right perspective of the period, this age will not be more complex nor very different from many other ages of human history, and that there will be, as in other ages, a few fundamental characteristics that mark it and that prove how the human heart and mind vary but little and develop but little from age to age. It is a notorious fact that in human history each age has an unjust and a most distorted notion of the age closely preceding it. The age of Pope had an unjust notion of the age of Shakespeare. The age of Wordsworth had a very distorted notion of the age of Pope. Our notion of the early part of the nineteenth century may have thus far been unjust and distorted, and it may be possible that this distortion lies in the notion of its marvelous complexity. To be sure we can not as yet obtain an ultimate view of it, but if the ultimate view lies in the direction of sim-

plicity perhaps we ought to begin to simplify our own conceptions. Would it not be sufficient to say that the age of Tennyson is characterized by an intense love for facts, for concrete facts, by an insatiable desire to verify the implications of facts as affecting theory and faith, and by the reaction of theory and faith upon facts? In short, the most serious and most important struggle that was going on in the age of Tennyson—a struggle that is constantly going on in the human race but which was accentuated into a tremendous conflict by peculiar circumstances—was the struggle simply between fact and faith.

The age of Wordsworth was an age of beginnings, of youthful exuberance, of awakening to the value of concrete facts on the one hand and to the power of wonder and admiration on the other. It was an age, for instance, which demanded to see a perfect nation and a perfect society in the immediate concrete, and to enjoy the wonder of seeing it suddenly precipitate itself out of the air and become an actuality—a tangible fact. This is why

> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very heaven![3]

Yet these precipitations were destined not to be as sudden as the people imagined. The adjustment of absolute fact with trascendental faith was a far greater and much more difficult task than they ever dreamed of, and the reactionary effect on the French Revolution and on Romanticism was to awaken them to this sober truth. But when the hand was once put to the plow there was no turning back. Men demanded facts and they set themselves to work as seriously as ever man has done to find facts and to adjust their implications and applications to the conditions of society and to life.

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[3] "Prelude," Bk. XI.

But this adjustment made sad inroads into the grounds upon which men rested their faith. There are in man instincts and intuitions, feelings and volitions which he can not account for, and the highest and deepest of which he has always held sacred—so sacred that he instinctively repels any cold analysis and dissection of them. There is also an ingrained materialism in the mind which can only admit facts which are tangible; and this latter tendency had its full swing in the age of Tennyson. The inundations it made upon matters hitherto given to faith were simply appalling. There was now an endless citation of facts, an arrangement and classification of facts on an enormous scale, a formulation of laws and systems. The facts of astronomy swung the center of the universe from this earth somewhere into the milky way. The correlation of forces was applied to consciousness as well as to physics and chemistry. The facts of biology were as fascinating and seemed to have as great a practical bearing on life as the facts of the soul. The evolutionary principle, itself based on a vast collection of facts and revealing the ruthlessness of nature in the destruction of things unfit to survive, struck a blow at faith in the goodness of God. Bible miracles in general were held to be the product of superstitious beliefs, since miracles can not be facts that demonstrate law. Scientific materialism explained higher phenomena by lower ones and left the destinies of the world to the mercies of its blinder forces. It blandly set forth its vision of the last state of the universe:

> Then star nor sun shall waken,
> Nor any change of light;
> Nor sound of waters shaken,
> Nor any sound or sight:
> Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,

> Nor days nor things diurnal;
> Only the sleep eternal
> In an eternal night.[4]

And enthusiastic but shortsighted prophets were not wanting who boldly declared that facts would soon claim the whole of experience and explain away all mystery, and who politely bowed religion, imagination, and poetry out at the back door. But there were those also who held firmly that the world of facts included only a small part of our experience and that the deepest and most permanent need of our breasts was an unseen and spiritual order; that however greatly the world of facts might be extended and enlarged by investigation and discovery there was, in man's inner nature, in the inexpugnable citadel of man's soul, a center of being far beyond the reach of facts, and, in the powers outside, where, on the fringe of things, logical thought expires and speech drops into silence, there was the center of Nescience; that it lay in the power of man's will to invoke from those centers power and truth and light whose rays when thus set ablaze would light up and irradiate the whole world of brute facts with a new significance and a splendor not really their own; and that in the process of willing these centers into activity the centers themselves would draw nigh to each other—the finite and the infinite—and behold! man would stand face to face with his God!

In this world, however, of incompleteness and of imperfections in character, where we seem to belong to two distinct orders of being, the power of faith can never hold in solution all the items of fact; no absolute adjustment of faith and fact can ever be made. The only way this adjustment can be made approximately, it has been suggest-

[4] Swinburne, "The Garden of Proserpine."

ed, is through the power of the will. If a given individual has a keen sensitiveness to facts and their various implications and is also conscientious concerning the purity of his faith, these powers are sure to bring conflict into his soul. And if his will is not as strong as either his sensitiveness to fact or his conscientiousness in faith he is sure not to be able to make a satisfactory adjustment. This state of mind is clearly revealed in much of the poetry of Matthew Arnold, who fell upon the "iron time of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears"—the iron time of Tennyson. Such random passages as the following prove it:

> And on earth we wander, groping, reeling;
> Powers stir in us, stir and disappear.
> Ah! and he, who placed our master-feeling,
> Fail'd to place that master-feeling clear.
>
> We but dream we have our wish'd-for powers,
> Ends we seek we never shall attain.
> Ah! *some* power exists there, which is ours?
> *Some* end is there, we indeed may gain?[4]

> We do not what we ought,
> What we ought not, we do,
> And lean upon the thought
> That chance will bring us through;
> But our own acts, for good or ill, are mightier powers.
>
> Yet, even when man forsakes
> All sin,—is just, is pure.
> Abandons all which makes
> His welfare insecure,—
> Other existences there are which clash with ours.[5]

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[4] "Self-Deception."
[5] "Empedocles."

Next to a weak and nerveless will, the most fatal thing to poetry is a divided will and the clash between our desires and affections resulting from it. If there is any being on earth whose eye should be single it is the poet. In his essay on Burns, what is it that Carlyle fixes upon as the prime cause of Burns' final failure in life? It is the lack of a firm religious faith and singleness of aim. "The wedge will rend rocks, but its edge must be sharp and single; if it be double, the wedge is bruised in pieces and will rend nothing." The fatality of this truth is nowhere better illustrated than in the poetry of Arthur Hugh Clough, a contemporary of Arnold and Tennyson. It is rather pitiful to read his thirteen stanzas of the first part of "Easter Day," which has for its refrain "Christ is not risen," and then to read the three feeble stanzas composing the second part which has for its refrain "Christ is risen;" and to see how in this poem and in much else he has written he calls on us to "Hope Evermore and Believe," but makes us conscious of the fact that his own heart and will are far from achieving anything of the hope which he offers. Had Clough lived in an age in which there had been no insatiable thirst for facts whose implications undermined the grounds of faith he would no doubt have written far higher and more heroic poetry. The faith which a poet must possess must not necessarily be an absolutely true one, (for who can say what that one is?) but it must be *a faith,* so that the feelings can be unified, the imagination kept whole, and the will undivided. Because of the impotence of our minds, this faith can never hold in solution all the items of fact; but the more items it so holds, the firmer and more permanent will be this synthesis of faith and fact. In the age of Tennyson there was such an inundation of new facts that only the firmest and most flexible minds

could adjust even a part of these facts to their faith and could construct on the basis of this adjustment a higher and sublimer faith.

Since we have now the essential characteristics of the times before us, let us see what were the chief qualities in Tennyson that fitted him to be the representative of these times. That Tennyson possessed passion and sensitiveness sufficiently to produce great poetry has never been questioned by anyone, as it had been in the case of Wordsworth. What one is mostly aware of in such a poem as "Rizpah" is the aroused and abandoned feelings of the character; and this is eminently typical of Tennyson's art. Tennyson throws himself with complete abandon into the story or the theme of his poem. Although the passion in Tennyson sometimes runs near the sentimental and the ranting it is never superficial. There is always method in his abandon. Those who hold that Tennyson is too sentimental to be considered seriously have certainly never observed the method with care.

In the portrayal of passion Tennyson always holds a middle course. Passions may be ranged on a scale from the superficial hysterical to the central feelings that lie too deep for tears. Tennyson avoids the extremes of the scale—the one extreme because the passions there are superficial, the other because he is not the master of the profoundest emotions of the human breast. The passions in his poems are such as can be understood by the common man, but also such as require some effort from the common man to comprehend fully. That is, though he appeals to popular sentiment he tends everywhere to lift that sentiment above itself. The "Miller's Daughter" is on the level of the enjoyment of the most untutored, while "Ulysses" approaches the realm of lofty and concentrated art that lifts the soul above the commonplace. But

within the range fitted to his genius Tennyson gives an almost infinite variety of impressions. Among the great number of his poems there are none that exactly repeat each other in sentiment. The delicacy of his perceptions makes the finest and most varied shades in his sentiments.

The quality of sensitiveness—his sensitiveness to all influences, the quality that expresses itself in the statement "I am a part of all that I have met"—is the quality that makes Tennyson peculiarly the representative of his age. He seems to have been susceptible to all the winds that blew from all quarters, and to have responded to all of them. Wordsworth from his childhood was deeply sensitive to the elemental powers, the great central forces of being, but lover of nature that he was, he needed the influence of his sister to teach him the beauties of the small and detached objects of nature. Tennyson needed no one to teach him the delicacies of perception. His sensitiveness did not have the depth of Wordsworth's but it could take in a greater variety of impressions. His mind was a delicate instrument that responded to and registered in itself the smallest and subtlest impressions that came to it from the widest varieties of sources. It responded to the political and social activities of the age, to the scientific and religious movements, to the skeptical and also the mystical elements in those movements, to the classical forms and themes of the past, to the romantic tendencies of the present, to the beauteous phenomena of nature, to man as man and also to man as a social being. It absorbed something from all these and other sources, but not "overmuch" from any one of them. Not only in choosing art forms but in selecting subject matter for poetry Tennyson in method was eclectic. And his mind, sensitive to all influences, was genuinely and deeply cultural, in the best sense of that term.

That Tennyson had a subtilizing intellect has hardly been sufficiently emphasized by the critics; for his perfect mastery of technique, his florid style, his capability of fine phrasing, of saying each thing in the poetic way, has permitted him to reason more in verse than is generally suspected in him or tolerated in other poets. In "In Memoriam," for example, there are many patches of intellectual subtilty, little pieces of intellectual logic that remind one of Pope; with this difference that the phrasing itself in Tennyson is often in strikingly concrete form and that his intellectual truth is placed in a richly ornamental setting and is surrounded with a dreamy mist of beauty.

That Tennyson possessed unusual energy of will is debatable. It is certain that he did not possess as indomitable a will or as victorious a faith as either Wordsworth or Browning. It is equally certain, on the other hand, that he did not possess as weak a will as some have charged him with, the will, for instance, that might be inferred to belong to the speaker of the lines—

> O weary life! O weary death!
> O spirit and heart made desolate!
> O damned vacillating state!—

which stand at the conclusion of one of Tennyson's early dramatic poems. Nor did he allow himself to be severed from poetry simply because great poetry demands a unified will and a clear and definite assumption of faith in the unseen, as did Matthew Arnold apparently when he laid poetry aside and found satisfaction in the more matter-of-fact business of prose-writing and acting the part of the man of the world. Even though Tennyson faltered often where he had firmly trod he nevertheless "beat his music out." He felt that life was a genuine fight; and he fought the fight manfully; he squared his

experience with his highest light of truth; he worked not "without a conscience or an aim;" he clung to "the mighty hopes that make us men" and taught others to cling to them; he believed in individual responsibility, and never hesitated to take his share of it upon himself:

> Yet none could better know than I,
> How much of act at human hands
> The sense of human will demands
> By which we dare to live or die.[6]

He saw clearly, too, that the reconciliation between fact and faith lay in the mediating but inexplicable power of the will. So that the point to which he comes oftenest and in which he can find genuine reconciliation and peace without surrendering manhood or paltering the truth, is the statement of

> "This main-miracle, that thou art thou,
> With power on thine own act and on the world."[7]*

This sense of human free-will "by which we dare to live or die," this power which we have on our own acts and on the world is a miracle, the "main-miracle" of life. Suppose historical miracles be satisfactorily proved to be superstitions, suppose all the forces of the outer world be explained by mechanical and evolutionary law, yet here in the inner circle of our being, springing up in the very midst of mechanical and evolutionary law, there is an independent, self-developing, self-directing power, which does not belong to the category of law and which defies all analysis. In this citadel of one's soul one can do battle, if need be, with the whole world. This is one

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[6] "In Memoriam," Poem, LXXXV.

[7] "De Profundis."

*See Note 5, Appendix.

of "the mighty hopes that make us men;" and Tennyson never surrendered it, but used it in his experience as a great meditating power between fact and faith.

Evidence is not wanting that Tennyson, in his youth, had something of the iron in him that characterized Keats when making a poem. This evidence is furnished by the manner in which Tennyson received the harsh criticism of the reviewers of his poetry in 1833. After pointing out some definite and important changes that Tennyson made in a poem as a result of Lockhart's criticism, severe and exasperating in the extreme but true as far as the faults were concerned, Van Dyke, in his book on Tennyson's Poetry, adds: "Now a poet who could take criticism in this fashion and use it to such good purpose, was certainly neither weak nor wayward. Weighed in the balance, he was not found wanting but steadily growing. He would not abandon his art at the voice of censure, but correct and perfect it, until it stood complete and sound beyond the reach of censure." This method of self-criticism and this determination as touching his purpose of becoming a great poet shows the volitional and iron side of the man's nature.

But Tennyson was almost morbidly sensitive to the implications of the new facts of his age and he was extremely conscientious in matters of faith. And the true measure of his will lies in the measure of the power to harmonize these diverse tendencies. It was no small achievement in Tennyson to produce harmony here. He considered this to be one of the chief concerns of his life —an achievement that would require time; and it *did* require time. There are plenty of falterings by the wayside, and he who looks to those alone may well agree with Professor Corson that Tennyson's poetry is "an expression of the highest sublimation of the skepticism which

came out of the eighteenth century" and that "In Memoriam" in particular "may almost be said to be the poem of nineteenth century skepticism."[8] But as it is essentially unfair to determine the worth of a thing by judging it in its making, so it is essentially unfair to judge a struggle with doubt while it is in progress. We care not what stage of progress a man may be in, but we do care about the direction he is facing. Moreover, in a poem that has something of epic movement in it, we must be sure to take in the swing of the movement. If, for example, one should judge the Book of Job by the passage —"Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand where he doth work, but I can not behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him,"—and should forget to notice in the conclusion the passage—"I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee"—he would surely have misread the work. And it is certain that "In Memoriam" must be read in the same spirit of epic movement as the Book of Job. It is the attainment in the end, the spiritual achievement, rather than the struggle, by which the work is to be judged. And the achievement with Tennyson is victory, victory before he had attained his fortieth year:

> O living will that shalt endure
> When all that seems shall suffer shock,
> Rise in the spiritual rock,
> Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure,
>
> That we may lift from out of dust
> A voice as unto him that hears,
> A cry above the conquer'd years
> To one that with us works, and trust,

[8] "An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry."

With faith that comes of self-control,
The truths that never can be proved
Until we close with all we loved,
And all we flow from, soul in soul.[9]

Tennyson explains that what he meant by the first line of this poem was the human will as distinguished from the divine. It is our ordinary everyday will, the will by which we make our choices between alternatives, the will that selects ideas and gives direction to our thought, that cultivates some feelings and avoids others, that motivates and gives guidance to our actions, that harmonizes and unifies our personalities,—it is this will that is the enduring part of us, that purifies our deeds and lifts us above time into eternity, that gives us a lasting hold on faith in the truths we cannot prove "until we close with all we loved, and all we flow from, soul in soul." And through the remainder of his life and in all of his later poetry Tennyson maintained this faith with an unfaltering will. Even in "Ulysses," a poem written before 1842, we hear the cry of a strong man coming to himself. Tennyson himself says that the poem was written more with his feeling of the loss of Arthur Hallam upon him than many of the poems in "In Memoriam." But here the feeling of loss has already been transformed into the feeling of constructive energy. Like "Lycidas," the poem gives a passionate but disinterested outlook upon life of a young man roused to deep thought as he stands by the grave of one of his fellows. One can hear the voice of the poet in the undertones of the poem. One can hear it mingle with the voice of Ulysses as he addresses his mariners who had ever taken the sunshine and the thunder with jolly welcome:

[9] "In Memoriam," Poem, XXIV.

Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.

To succeed greatly a poet must have large artistic ideals, must possess ground work of positive faith in the worth of human life, and must have the energy of human will to endeavor unceasingly, against all distracting interests, to attain his artistic and ethical ideals, to "smite the sounding furrows" until he die. A will of this sort—if not the greatest in power, at least fine in quality—belonged to Tennyson:

That which we are, we are,—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

CHAPTER VI

TENNYSON: MEMORY AND THE MYSTIC ELEMENT.

I.

Although Tennyson did not possess as intense and penetrating a power of will as Wordsworth, he avoided some of the excesses of sterility, arbitrariness, and lack of humor accompanying the too strenuous exercise of will. He retained comparatively a greater mobility in his thought and feeling and more humor in his life and works, though there is neither an overabundance of humor nor a lack of arbitrariness to be found even in him. Wordsworth, we have seen, fixed his mind somewhat arbitrarily upon the experiences of his childhood, and by the power of will and memory reproduced in himself an immediate mystical experience which he thought had value as giving to us suggestions or intimations of immortality. Tennyson, in common with Wordsworth, was possessed with the same romantic "Passion of the Past." It expressed itself less arbitrarily in him than in Wordsworth and therefore less definitely and more flexibly. It was not so directly the memory of our childhood instincts and intuitions that was "a master of light of all our seeing" as with Wordsworth, but it was the more general memory of certain god-like experiences of the past, and his passion for them, by which he could perceive

> The high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day
> Strike on the Mount of Vision.[1]

In our study of Wordsworth we saw that the bareness of his interest in his college days and the moral shock sustained from the French Revolution set his boyhood experiences before him in bold perspective, and made him recur to them in an unusual way for moral support and for poetic material. When Tennyson was twenty-four he received a similar moral shock that produced somewhat similar effects. To a mind as sensitive and as capable literally of being haunted as Tennyson's it is hard to conceive how great was the shock of the death of his fellow student and most intimate friend. Then, too, there are times when an idea, or a theory, takes hold of people's minds like an obsession. The thing seems to be infectious. Such an idea was the materialistic notion that man is not immortal, which, borne on the wings of scientific progress, now swept through the thoughts of the English people with ungovernable rapidity. Tennyson was caught in the spirit of it for a time. It seized hold of him and unmanned him. Such an idea is always doubly and trebly powerful when it is connected with some specific personal fact. The fact of his friend's sudden death and the fact of grave men's grave doubts as to the permanence of anything human or divine were easily sufficient to plunge the young poet into utter despair, to make him aware suddenly of the happiness of past days, and conscious that those days were irrevocably past, and to make him long all the more poignantly for them. No wonder that the finest lyrics of a great lyric poet—"Break, Break, Break," and "Tears, Idle Tears"—should have their chief motive in the infinite longing for

[1] "The Ancient Sage."

the touch of a vanished hand and in an indescribable yearning for the days that are no more. In each case Tennyson gives himself completely to the emotion of the poem; and there is no consolation in either. The only relieving elements are the exquisite beauty of the imagery, language, and music; yet the ultimate service of these is to enhance the poignancy of the grief. In Wordsworth's lyrical songs that express yearning there is always an under current movement of resistance to the yearning itself. No matter how much Wordsworth longs for the radiance that is forever taken from his sight he

> Will grieve not, rather find
> Strength in what remains behind,[2]

while Tennyson voluntarily and whole-heartedly surrenders himself to the yearning or to the emotion of grief. Even this abandon is the abandon of a strong soul; and we are soon to see the poet on the way to recovery from the severe shock.

It was natural that during the process of his recovery from the loss of his friend he would produce one of his longest poems *in memory of* that friend, that in the poem itself there would be a thousand backward glances, not to his early boyhood days, but to the days of love and glorious companionship, days of walking "beside the river's wooded beach," of reading "the Tuscan poets on the lawn," of divinely singing "old Philosophy on Argive heights," of "threading some Socratic dream," days when the first raptures of conscious authorship were at their height, when

> Thought leapt out to wed with Thought
> Ere Thought could wed itself with Speech.[3]

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[2] "Intimations of Immortality."
[3] "In Memoriam," Poem, XXIII.

Tennyson deepens immeasurably the pathos in the poem by contrasting endlessly, in the subtlest ways imaginable, the happiness of his "four sweet years" of friendship to the emptiness of the days of mourning that followed. It was natural that he should idealize that friendship, and all the objects associated with it, as, for instance:

> And all we met was fair and good,
> And all was good that Time could bring,
> And all the secret of the Spring
> Moved in the chambers of the blood.[4]

It was natural, too, that the poet's scientific and somewhat skeptical spirit should make him perfectly conscious of this idealizing tendency, and aware that the past will always win a glory from its being far

> And orb into the perfect star
> We saw not when we moved therein.[5]

If Tennyson is sometimes dangerously near the sentimental he is never naive. The scientific spirit which helped to plunge him into unutterable woe also taught him to distinguish between the dream that has orbed itself into a perfect star and the fact that the star really was never seen when he moved within the orb of it. Wordsworth had a vision of the past which he would not undo, but upon which he would build a constructive creation. Tennyson's fancy and his scientific temper made him set about to meditate between the dream and the fact. And the result in "In Memoriam" is the expression of a deep human grief and the fanciful and pictorial idealizing of past facts and associations that gave rise to that grief.

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[4] "In Memoriam," Poem, XXIII.
[5] "In Memoriam," Poem, XXIV.

But there was another order of memory in Tennyson distinct from and above the memory of days that have been and never more can be. This order was the memory of more than mortal things, of something that touched him with mystic gleams, of a transcendental world of experience. It was this memory that led to the same inner mystical experiences—confessedly beyond the power of words to render adequately—that were for Tennyson, as for Wordsworth, the proof and seal of his faith in immortality.

In "The Poet," written as early as 1830, Tennyson conceived the poet not only

> Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love,

but he imagined the poet to possess mystic insight both into the secret of his own soul and into the "marvel of the everlasting will:"

> He saw thro' life and death, thro' good and ill,
> He saw thro' his own soul,
> The marvel of the everlasting will,
> An open scroll,
>
> Before him lay.

This no doubt is a youthful over-statement of the might of a poet's mind, for Tennyson himself was soon to learn and to teach in his poetry that there are a few things in the universe that even the prophetic mind of a poet cannot *see through,* and that one of these things is the marvel of the everlasting will, both the will of man and the will of God. But in the same edition in which "The Poet" was published was another poem entitled "The Mystic," in the following lines of which we have suggested to us what it was that the poet "saw thro':"

> Angels have talked with him, and showed him thrones:
> Ye knew him not; he was not one of ye,
> Ye scorned him with an undiscerning scorn:
> Ye could not read the marvel in his eye,
> The still serene abstraction.....
> Always there stood before him, night and day,
> Of wayward vary-colored circumstance
> The imperishable presences serene,
> Colossal, without form, or sense, or sound,
> Dim shadows but unwaning presences
> Four-faced to four corners of the sky.

What the young poet "saw thro'" most clearly was the fact that behind this immediate world of form and sense and sound there is another world of colossal and imperishable presences "without form, or sense, or sound," even though this world, as we shall see, was "far, far away." And no poet's mind, excepting Wordsworth's perhaps, has ever been more constantly haunted by these presences than was the mind of Tennyson.

But Tennyson both for artistic and scientific reasons scarcely ever attempted, as boldly as Wordsworth, to render these presences directly; but he described them objectively and by suggestion. So persistently did he do this that there is hardly a page of his poetry that does not show some traces of these "imperishable presences." Constantly and in endless variety and in "wayward vary-colored circumstance" there hover about his poetry mystic gleams and mystic voices and mystic worlds and mystic laws—"the law within the law," "that true world within the world," "a deep below the deep, and a height beyond the height," "the lone glow and long roar," "far-folded mists and gleaming halls of morn," "from the great deep to the great deep," "echoes roll from soul to soul, and grow forever and forever, "an arch where-thro' gleams that untravel'd world whose margin fades

forever and forever," "the Holy Grail all over cover'd with a luminous cloud," and arm cloth'd in white samite, mystic, wonderful," a city "built to music, therefore never built at all, and therefore built forever," truths "deep-seated in our mystic frame," "that mystery where God-in-man is one with man-in-God,"—but one cannot go on forever with the "glimpses of forgotten dreams" that Tennyson's poetry awakens in one and that haunt one's fancy and echo and re-echo in one's feelings like heavenly music, now "faintly, merrily—far and far away" like the "horns of Elfland faintly blowing" and now vast as "with the roll of ages" that carry one to "the utmost bound of human thought" and also to the inner "deeps of personality," reverberating and again reverberating, faintly enough to be sure but nevertheless reverberating, the central sentiment:

> Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet—
> Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.[6]

That Tennyson considered the powers of memory and of will to be the chief powers that enter into the mystical experience, and that they are the chief powers that do enter into it, is not difficult to prove. In the mystical state there always seems to be present a sudden feeling of having experienced something like it before, only something more heavenly and god-like; as if at some indefinite past time a divine gleam of light had been given one by which he had power to lay hold on the unseen. To all mystics the faculty of memory is a divine faculty because directly by means of it they enter into their states of rapture. Tennyson explains that, if memory is merely

[6] "The Higher Pantheism."

of time, and the body and mind of man is of matter, it would not be possible for men to conceive an order of being above the material:

> For memory dealing but with time,
> And he [man] with matter, could she climb
> Beyond her own material prime?[7]

To this power of memory which receives "glimpses of forgotten dreams" there must be added the power of will. In a letter recorded in the "Memoir" Tennyson says: "A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me thro' repeating my own name several times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being." The intensity of mental attention, the act of repeating a name, the power of fixing the mind on a definite object,—in this case the poet's own personality,—these represent the power of will in bringing on the mystical state.

The most elaborate account in poetry that Tennyson has given us of this state is found in the ninety-fifth poem of "In Memoriam" wherein the powers of memory and will are clearly set forth. After recounting how his friends and himself had spent an evening in singing he tells how in his heart he desired to be alone and to read the letters of the dead Arthur:

> But when those others, one by one,
> Withdrew themselves from me and night,
> And in the house light after light
> Went out, and I was all alone,

[7] "The Two Voices."

A hunger seized my heart; I read
Of that glad year which once had been,
In those fallen leaves which kept their green,
The noble letters of the dead.

Then, when the silent-speaking words began to break the silence, he recounts how the energy and power of his love, defying change to test his worth, responded to the faith and vigor and boldness of his friend's words until his friend out of the past seemed to touch him in the present:

And strangely on the silence broke
The silent-speaking words, and strange
Was love's dumb cry defying change
To test his worth; and strangely spoke

The faith, the vigor, bold to dwell
On doubts that drive the coward back,
And keen thro' wordy snares to track
Suggestion to her inmost cell.

So word by word, and line by line,
The dead man touch'd me from the past

After thus having wrought on his emotion and will over the letters of his friend, he felt a sudden mystic transformation coming on, the light of sense went out, and a new order of being was revealed:

And all at once it seemed at last
The living soul was flash'd on mine,

And mine in this was wound and whirl'd
About empyreal heights of thought,
And came on that which is, and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,

Æonian music measuring out
The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—
The blows of Death.

"Vague words!" the poet himself ejeculates, and vague enough they are, but the experience itself however poorly described carries an unquestioned conviction with it to the mind of the poet. In the "Memoir" it is recorded that this kind of experience was "not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossiblity, the loss of personality (if so it were) seemed no extinction but the only true life." And the poet adds in the record, "I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said that the state is utterly beyond words?" Professor Tyndall reports Tennyson to have said of this state, "It is no nebulous ecstasy, but a state of transcendent wonder, associated with absolute clearness of mind."

Another elaborate description of this state is found in the "Ancient Sage." In the latter part of the poem the sage answers the skeptical youth, who reads from a scroll that it is vain to tell him "Earth is fair when all is dark as night," by saying in part:

> The doors of Night may be the gates of Light;
> For wert thou born or blind or deaf, and then
> Suddenly heal'd, how wouldst thou glory in all
> The splendors and the voices of the world!

But the youth insists that men are

> Worms and maggots of to-day
> Without their hope of wings!
> Tho' some have gleams, or so they say,
> Of more than mortal things.

Then the sage replies by emphasizing the fact that strange but convincing memories of the indefinite past teach him far higher things than the common experiences of to-day:

To-day? but what of yesterday? for oft
On me, when boy, there came what then I call'd,
Who knew no books and no philosophies,
In my boy-phrase, "The Passion of the Past."
The first gray streak of earliest summer-dawn,
The last long strife of waning crimson gloom,
As if the late and early were but one—
A height, a broken grange, a grove, a flower
Had murmurs, "Lost and gone, and lost and gone!"
A breath, a whisper—some divine farewell—
Desolate sweetness—far and far away—
What had he loved, what had he lost, the boy?
I know not, and I speak of what has been.

Thus much for the power of memory. From this point the sage describes the way in which his mind focused itself on the word that was the symbol of himself until it brought on the mystic state:

And more, my son! for more than once when I
Sat all alone, revolving in myself
The word that is the symbol of myself,
The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,
And past into the Nameless, as a cloud
Melts into heaven. I touch'd my limbs, the limbs
Were strange, not mine—and yet no shade of doubt,
But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self
The gain of such large life as match'd with ours
Were sun to spark—unshadowable in words,
Themselves but shadows of a shadow-world.

But to the youth who still insists that

Idle gleams will come and go,
But still the clouds remain;—

the sage replies:

And idle gleams to thee are light to me;—

and the final advice of the sage to the youth is that he should climb the Mount of Blessing,

> Whence, if thou
> Look higher, then—perchance—thou mayest—beyond
> A hundred ever-rising mountain lines,
> And past the range of Night and Shadow—see
> The high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day
> Strike on the Mount of Vision.

Thus through the inward workings of the will upon the memory of more than mortal things there is produced in the mind a sense of the sudden enlarging of the personality, of coming in contact with the deep pulsations of the world, of losing the self and passing into the Nameless, a sense of Spiritual Freedom in the heart of man and in the heart of the universe.

II

It may be urged that the ninety-fifth poem of "In Memoriam" and the "Ancient Sage" are not fairly representative of Tennyson's large body of poetry. But we are here concerned with some of the spiritual sources from which that poetry has its rise and with something of the ground work upon which it rests. And these sources and grounds are defined in the poems we have analyzed. What Tennyson does in these poems is to describe a mood of the mind at the point where the mind feels that it comes upon "what is;" and though the poems may be execptional the experience which underlies them and out of which they are wrought, is of inestimable importance to the poet.

This experience has validity in refuting the materialistic claim that there is no life beyond the life of the senses, and in assuring the truth of our faith in immortality. At the point in the poem "Two Voices" where the poet

really takes heart against the voice of the skeptical spirit, he says:

> Who forged that other influence,
> That heat of inward evidence,
> By which he doubts against the sense?

To this no skeptical philosophy can successfully reply, for, to doubt against the sense is to believe in something other than sense, and the heat of inward evidence gives assurance of that belief. It makes man's heart forebode a mystery, which he names Eternity.

But this fact of Eternity nature does not reveal to man:

> That type of Perfect in his mind
> In Nature can he nowhere find.

Indeed, it is not in the sense world and in nature that Tennyson finds an answer to the skeptical spirit, nor the assurance of immortality. He frankly accepts the materialistic interpretation of sense and nature as a vast mechanism based on chance happenings, and he needs something other than sense to give him a positive faith. Wordsworth found passions and volitions everywhere in the goings-on of the universe, living entities in nature, and from thence low breathing instincts and emanations that have a regenerative power on the human mind; a moral spirit that flows through all things, that transcends nature yet manifests itself in sense; an organic whole, instinct with power and vitality and especially valid to the mind when flowing through the channel of memory. Tennyson, on the contrary, found no such life in the senses. The sense world was for him a piece of soulless machinery; and it was his business as the poet of his age to meditate between this dark aspect of physical sense and a traditional and inherited faith.

Thus according to this view there can be no low breathing instincts and intuitions in external nature that have deep and subtle correspondences with our own experiences. To be sure, external nature may be used not only to reflect, as a looking glass, the varying moods of man's temper, but also to take on, in a fanciful way, whatever mood the poet wishes to give her. But be sure, Tennyson would say, never make the naive mistake of supposing there is any real correspondence between the spirit of external nature, if it have any spirit at all, and the grief and despair and happiness of man's spirit. The correspondence is only fanciful and ornamental.

Again, the evolutionary law of selection played havoc with the old idea of design in nature. In olden times it was supposed that the fact, for example, that water, when crystallizing, became lighter and rose to the surface instead of sinking beneath and thereby preventing all the water from freezing, showed absolute proof of a wise and beneficent providence who designed the same; that the wing of a bird was designed and specifically fitted to the bird's flying; that the eye was specially designed to transmit rays of ether to the brain, etc. But the new wisdom said that the lightness of the ice was due to one happy chance that involved in the process a thousand disastrous possibilities; that if arrested development had not set in just when it did thousands of creatures that do not have wings now might be blessed with them and be as free as the birds; that we might have a thousand senses, all as glorious as the sense of sight, or we might have none, but by the slightest accident or chance we have survived with five senses. Thus, according to this wisdom, a poet might be ridiculed for basing any serious poetic representation on the principle of design in external

nature. Tennyson declares himself quite emphatically on this doctrine:

> I found Him not in the world or sun,
> Or eagle's wing, or insect's eye.[8]

Nor did he find him in any other old-fashioned or intellectualized dogma:

> Nor thro' the questions men may try
> The petty cob-webs we have spun.[8]

Indeed nature seems to be, in certain of her aspects, in open strife with God, and to lend man evil dreams. She, of herself, is blind, because she works by the law of chance. She is pitiless, because she has no feeling for the individual. She is malignant, for she not only destroys the individual but also the type, and mocks man's moral and religious aspirations. Tennyson makes external nature say to man:

> 'So careful of the type?' but no.
> From scarped cliff and quarried stone
> She cries, 'A thousand types are gone;
> I care for nothing, all shall go.
>
> 'Thou makest thine appeal to me:
> I bring to life, I bring to death;
> The spirit does but mean the breath:
> I know no more.'[9]

External nature, according to Tennyson, has neither the power to reveal God to the soul nor to convince man of his immortality, and to a man in deep waters as regards faith she sounds like

> An ever-breaking shore
> That tumbled in the Godless deep.[10]

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[8] "In Memoriam," Poem CXXIV.
[9] "In Memoriam," Poem LVI.
[10] "In Memoriam," Poem CXXIV.

And yet "this round of green, this orb of flame," this "fantastic beauty," is not absolutely godless. There is indeed a god behind the external world but he is not directly responsible for its blind forces and ruthless destructiveness. He can be seen only by glimpses and far away splendors, for he plays about the surfaces only of external nature. As behind a far away summer cloud the lightning plays softly in a quiet summer evening, so on the farthest edges of this vast external universe mystic gleams, "green-rushing from the rosy thrones of dawn," vie with each other in splendid and brilliant display and

> Vast images in glimmering dawn,
> Half shown, are broken and withdrawn.[11]

Though these glimmerings hover only about the outer surface of the great contour of the universe and tend to fade away into misty indistinctness, they are of much importance to the mind of the poet. For the poet joins them in his experience to the heat of inward evidence that has its roots in the power of an exalted and transcendental memory and makes them bear testimony to the fact of immortality.

It is barely possible to explain this memory as the memory of a pre-existent state. At the point in the "Two Voices" where the poet waxes strong against the skeptical voice, he says,

> As here we find in trances, men
> Forget the dream that happens then,
> Until they fall in trance again;
>
> So might we, if our state were such
> As one before, remember much,
> For those two likes might meet and touch.

[11] "The Two Voices."

This explanation, however, is only tentative. Tennyson feels that these memories may be memories of pre-existent life, or they may not. We cannot be sure. But there is one thing upon which the poet has positive conviction, namely, that he is deeply conscious of strange presences, such as no language may declare, which are bound up with an inner sense of memory and will. It is this experience in the "Two Voices" that keeps his horizon from becoming dark, that makes him apprehend a labor working to an end, that causes him to hear a Heavenly Friend. It is this experience, joined with a picture of human love in the poem, that gives him final victory and makes him rejoice.

This mystic memory, then, serves as a mediator between the fact of scientific materialism and the fact of immortality. It refutes the view that there is no life beyond the life of the senses, and serves as a seal to our faith in immortality. Immortality is at best a shadowy thing for us here below. But when the idea of it once finds lodgment in our minds its claim upon us is well nigh boundless. Grant its reality and it becomes sovereign in the mind. And it matters not on how minute, or trivial, or vague a fact or circumstance it rests for its verification to our consciousness. It can be confidently said that had Tennyson not had this inner experience of the memory of more than mortal things he would have remained in the "slough of despond" and would have given us the poetry that brings the eternal note of sadness in and that tends to settle in despair. He would hardly have attained to that joy and positive faith that a man must possess when he aspires to become the representative poet of a nation and a race.

CHAPTER VII

TENNYSON: FREEDOM AND LAW.

I

The central basis upon which Tennyson built a positive faith was the power of will and the principle of freedom grounded thereon. Even though he could not find God in world or sun, in eagle's wing or insect's eye, it does not follow that he did not find Him at all. On the contrary, the ardency of his seeking was rather intensified as a result of its being narrowed in direction; and while the scientific views he held regarding external nature narrowed the natural and mystic tendencies of his experience, they tended to direct him to seek for the truth that cannot die more directly within the soul. And he found that truth in the "marvel of the everlasting will" and in the miracle of the power of free-will in man.

But the theory of evolution and the facts of science in general and scientific materialism in particular placed strict conditions and limitations on Tennyson's notion of the power of freedom as well as on his conceptions of external nature. It is easy to see how a planet in its mechananical and unvarying course through the heavens is governed by a fixed and unchangeable law. It is even easy enough to see how a plant, or an animal, is governed by the same principles of unvarying law in its growth and

mechanical round of activities. It is easy moreover, says Scientific Materialism, to see how man, who is simply more complex in his make-up and shows more outward deviations and variations but is ultimately of the same material which composes animal plant and star,—how man is subject precisely to the same inexorable law, and that his free-will is an utter delusion. When one passes from the outer world of mechanical law that obviously guides a planet in its course to the inner world of man's soul, as he thinks of it, he is more and more impressed that this law should obtain throughout. At what particular point does it cease to obtain? is the question that is decidedly the most difficult to answer.

Now, Tennyson is duly impressed with the fact of the orderliness and the mechanical fixedness of the universe in which we live. He surrenders to it as much as any poet dare surrender. He surrenders the stars and all the hosts of heaven to absolutely blind but unchangeable forces:

> A star that with the choral starry dance
> Join'd not, but stood, and standing saw
> The hollow orb of moving Circumstance
> Roll'd round by one fix'd law.[1]

And societies and nations are to adjust themselves to something that is very much like this admirable "Circumstance roll'd round by one fix'd law." An ideal land is

> A land of settled government,
> A land of just and old renown.[2]

And the people who dwell in such a land are those who have learned

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[1] "The Palace of Art."
[2] "You Ask Me."

To live by law,
Acting the law *they* live by without fear.[3]

Although this ideal of law by which societies and governments are to exist enters very largely into Tennyson's poetry, it is quite evident that if the principle of inexorable law be carried through the whole of man's experience man becomes as mechanical and soulless as the stars that run blindly through the heavens; a web will be woven across his soul as surely as it is "woven across the sky," a ghastlier cry will come out of the waste places of his soul than from the "waste places" of external nature and the "godless deep." Tennyson realizes that he is caught in the mesh of his own weaving, or rather in that which was woven for him by his social and scientific environment. He saw, more clearly than most men see, how deep the contradiction really is between the postulate that man's soul is immortal and free and the assumption that "nothing is that errs from law." Though he saw the contradiction between freedom and absolute fixedness, he sometimes fell into Charybdis in order to avoid Scylla. One of the mightiest efforts, however, in his work as a poet was to make the passage successfully—to mediate between the ideas of freedom and fixed law, between personal power and impersonal force. He surrenders much, indeed, to fixedness but he cannot, and never does, surrender all. Even the will of man itself is invoked to mediate:

Thy will, a power to make
This ever-changing world of circumstance,
In changing, chime with never-changing Law.[4]

But the fact that man has the power of freedom in a

[3] "Œnone."
[4] "To the Duke of Argyll."

world of "never-changing law" involves no contradiction really. The thing itself is a miracle, a great and forever indissoluble mystery. And even though man can never know or explain the mystery, he is to believe that there *is* "never-changing Law" and to believe, and to act on the belief, that there *is* free-will in himself.

Now, of course, the will is not boundlessly free, for the material upon which it acts is conditioned by the powers of heredity and environment. The only thing absolutely necessary to postulate is that somewhere at the innermost circle of our being (however small that circle is, and in Tennyson's estimation it is exceedingly small in our present state of development) there is a self-directing and absolutely independent power. And within this very small margin man must work out his salvation with fear and trembling. According to the disclosures of scientific truth, however, this work of the self-developing and self-enlarging process of the will, will take aeons of time. Man's little margin of freedom, which is the proof of his manliness, his immortality, and his far off ultimate success, must not take liberties in interrupting suddenly or unexpectedly the orderliness and fixedness of "never-changing Law." It has already taken aeons of time for man to attain the little increment of freedom which he now possesses, and it will take further aeons to touch him into final shape:

> Man as yet is being made, and ere the crowning Age of ages,
> Shall not aeon after aeon pass and touch him into shape?[5]

Man's will is thus progressively free, and attains to a larger circle of freedom by slow degrees. Tennyson says,

[5] "The Making of Man."

"Man's Free-will is but a bird in a cage; he can stop at the lower perch, or he can mount to a higher. Then that which is and knows will enlarge his cage, give him a higher and a higher perch, and at last break off the top of his cage, and let him out to be one with the Free-will of the Universe." And this is the adjustment, the mediation between the theory of freedom and the scientific theory of orderly developement. In accordance with this idea the solid earth

> In tracts of fluent heat began,
> And grew to seeming-random forms,
> The seeming prey of cyclic storms,
> Till at the last arose the man;
>
> Who throve and branch'd from clime to clime,
> The herald of a higher race,
> And of himself in higher place,
> If so he type this work of time
>
> Within himself, from more to more;
> Or, crown'd with attributes of woe
> Like glories, move his course, and show
> That life is not as idle ore,
>
> But iron dug from central gloom,
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
> And batter'd with the shocks of doom
>
> To shape and use.[6]

It is thus that man seemingly has arisen out of the cosmical order of the universe, that somehow he has become the herald of a higher race, that he now somehow has the god-like power to "type this work of time within himself" and to grow "from more to more," that he has at-

[6] "In Memoriam," Poem, CXVIII.

tained a certain slender margin of freedom and can gradually enlarge this margin; and that he is called upon in this life to enlarge it, to

> Arise and fly
> The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
> Move upward, working out the beast
> And let the ape and tiger die.[6]

But the general fixedness of things in this world makes it impossible for any one generation of people to enlarge materially the margin of free-will and the sphere of freedom. If one generation enlarge them but the most fractional, infinitesimal part of an enlargement, it has indeed done well. The only thing one can say confidently about the race is that as a whole it is facing in the right direction; and it is precisely this fact that is the source of Tennyson's optimism. The bird, however, is as yet far from breaking off the top of the cage. It has not always mounted to the higher perch, therefore that which is and knows could not enlarge its cage. The race has not only too much of the ape and tiger in it at present to become one with the free-will of the Universe but it is also afflicted with taints of blood and sins of will—it has not done its positive best. So that the final consummation of universal freedom can only be hoped for in some "far-off divine event, to which the whole creation moves:"

> O, yet we trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill,
> To pangs of nature, sins of will,
> Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

[6] "In Memoriam," Poem, CXVIII.

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroy'd,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.[7]

The most conspicuous element that enters into this theory of freedom and marks its peculiarity is the element of time. Time, to be sure, is a purely man-made affair and its order is not applicable to Deity:

For was, and is, and will be, are but is,
And all creation is one act at once,
The birth of light; but we that are not all,
As parts, can see but parts, now this, now that,
And live, perforce, from thought to thought, and make
One act a phantom of succession. Thus
Our weakness somehow shapes the shadow, Time.[8]

That is from the "Princess," and likewise from the "Ancient Sage" we learn that

With the Nameless is nor day nor hour;
Tho' we, thin minds, who creep from thought to thought,
Break into "Thens" and "Whens" the Eternal Now.

Though God is the Eternal Now and transcends altogether the time category, human beings on this planet must needs live and work out their salvation in the order of time. In the age of Tennyson the truths of science brought home to men's minds in a new and impressive way the immensity of time and the vastness of its accompanying mystery—space. The fact of time, for instance, filled Carlyle's soul with wonder and dumb awe:—"That great mystery of Time, were there no other; the illimitable, silent, never-resting thing called Time, rolling, rushing on, swift, silent, like an all-embracing ocean-tide,

[7] "In Memoriam," Poem, LIV.
[8] Part Third.

on which we and all the Universe swim like exhalations, like apparitions, which *are*, and then *are not*: this is forever very literally a miracle; a thing to strike us dumb,—for we have no word to speak about it." This same fact greatly enamoured Tennyson's imagination. His mind was constantly haunted by the vast deep

> Where all that was to be, in all that was,
> Whirl'd for a million aeons thro' the vast
> Waste dawn of multitudinous-eddying light.[9]

To the imagination of Tennyson time is long and art is fleeting:

> The fires that arch this dusky dot—
> Yon myriad-worlded way—
> The vast sun-clusters' gather'd blaze,
> World-isles in lonely skies,
> Whole heavens within themselves, amaze
> Our brief humanities.
> And so does Earth; for Homer's fame,
> Tho' carved in harder stone—
> The falling drop will make his name
> As mortal as my own.[10]

But instead of impressing his mind with awe and wonder as Carlyle's this fact of time's immensity gave Tennyson's imagination scope and freedom to build visions of the future greatness of man. Though the will of man be hampered by original evil—

> Perchance from some abuse of Will
> In worlds before the man
> Involving ours—[10]

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[9] "De Profundis."

[10] Epilogue to "Charge of the Heavy Brigade."

and though the general absence of plasticity and the presence of fixedness in all things make against the idea of any rapid progress, the race nevertheless can, if it is facing in the right direction, arrive at the fullest realization of universal freedom in the latter ages of the world. It is the profound conviction of this possibility—for it is still only a possibility if man is free to choose—that animates the clarion call of Tennyson in the "Locksley Hall" of his youth:

> Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward,
> forward let us range,
> Let the great world spin forever down the
> ringing grooves of change.

And it is the profound conviction of this same possibility that animates the clarion call of Tennyson in the "Locksley Hall" of his old age:

> Follow you the star that lights a desert
> pathway, yours or mine.
> Forward, till you see the Highest Human
> Nature is divine.
>
> Follow Light, and do the Right—for man
> can half-control his doom—
> Till you find the deathless Angel seated in
> the vacant tomb.

This last passage suggests another phase of our subject. We have thus far been discussing freedom as a social and racial phenomenon. But it has a most important personal side. Even though the noble race of the far-off future, with its battle flag furled "in the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world," is to attain to a universal freedom such as we in no wise possess at present, it does not follow that individuals of the present

generation are, for that reason, condemned to destruction; these are only a little less fortunate than those of the future race and these now and here can attain to a direct personal immortality. In the immortal state we are not to remerge into the general soul of things which is "faith as vague as all unsweet," but we are to retain our personal identity:

> Eternal form shall still divide
> The eternal soul from all beside;
> And I shall know him when we meet.[11]

It must be remembered, too, that in the order of existence above us there is no order of time whatsoever. That state transcends time, and from its point of view there is no difference in time in our various arrivals in its state even though we are separated here by æons of time. There it is an "Eternal Now." "With the Nameless is nor day nor hour." This is the way of all the mystics. To lay hold on personal immortality, then, we need only the smallest increment of free choice; for in our wills, however conditioned by the fixedness of the materials on which they work, we can even here transcend time—however vast in its extent in this order,—and be one with the Eternal. For this world of time after all is a dream world and our wills are the only reality. This fact is communicated to the unbelieving youth by the Ancient Sage:

> But thou be wise in this dream-world of ours,
> Nor take thy dial for thy deity,
> But make the passing shadow serve thy *will*.

Thus personal as well as social freedom and immortality is assured us.

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[11] "In Memoriam," Poem, XLVII.

II

Now, however encompassed by narrow limits our wills may be and however strongly scientific facts may make against the theory of freedom itself, it is vastly important to believe that we are free. Life, in short, is not worth living if we do not believe this. Tennyson, it is said, wrote at the end of the poem "Despair:" "In my boyhood I came across the Calvinistic Creed, and assuredly however unfathomable the mystery, if one cannot believe in the freedom of the human will as of the Divine, life is hardly worth having." For, what is a man more than a beast or a stone, if both while he is living and while dust and ashes, he is to be whirled through eternities of time by a blind and inexorable force which has no pity nor sympathy, which cares nothing for individuals nor types, which destroys fifty seeds in bringing one to bear, which knows only that the spirit means but breath, which shrieks against man's creed of personal love and personal life, which blows man about the desert dust and seals him within the iron hills;—but peace; come away: this is after all an earthly song. Man must have and does have a personal and transcendental will which stands absolutely apart from and independent of the dead and mechanical and impersonal forces which run the external universe. This will is free, indomitable, and never-dying. It has direct business with the Eternal. It can retain its identity or it can surrender itself, or what is more, it can perform the miracle of doing both things at once. It needs no intermediary or intercessor. It can make its own intercessions and perform miracles by prayer. "More things are wrought by prayer than this

world dreams of." It ends in marvel, wonder, and miracle—it is indeed the "main-miracle" of life. "A thing to strike us dumb," Carlyle would say, "for we have no word to speak about it." However feeble one's speech may be, "if one cannot believe in the freedom of the human will as of the Divine, life is hardly worth having."

In fact, what is true of Tennyson's poetry is this: that parallel to the idea of law that plays such a prominent part in his poetry there runs the idea of the mystery of free-will. To say that the idea of law is the central idea of Tennyson's poetry is to utter a half-truth. The other half is the truth that freedom is written over the whole face of this poetry. In the "Idylls of the King" we learn that

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfills himself in many ways,—

that is, according to law and outward orderliness here below; and it is also written in the "Idylls" that

> Man is man and master of his fate,

and that the purpose of these "Idylls" is that of

> Shadowing Sense at war with Soul,
> Ideal manhood closed in real man.

In "In Memoriam," where all things terrestial are represented as moving off slowly, grandly, and orderly, as if with the "roll of the ages," to some "far-off divine event," there is written at the beginning of it

> That men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things—

and at the close of it that there is the living will which shall endure after other things have suffered dissolution, and which shall vouch for us

> The truths that never can be proved
> Until we close with all we loved,
> And all we flow from, soul in soul.

Likewise in the "Ancient Sage" man is admonished to avoid the swamp of voluptuousness and to lay his up hill shoulder to the wheel and climb the Mount of Blessing; and in the latter "Locksley Hall" to follow light and do the right until his human nature itself be transformed into the divine. "I have heard that there is iron in the blood and I believe it," says Gama in the "Princess." And it is just this quality of iron, of personal energy and personal freedom, that makes Tennyson's poetry something more than the subject matter for scholarly research with a view to learn what the age of Tennyson thought and felt. It is this that makes his poetry an invigorating tonic to our souls and that saves the poetry itself from vacillation and mere virtuosity. It is this, in short, that makes it live in the hearts of men. Again and again when Tennyson seems to falter at the staggering notion that the blind destructiveness of external nature and the rigidity of mechanical law make sad inroads into the sanctity of man's soul, he falls back with renewed energy upon the main strength of manhood, the strength of will:

> O, well for him whose will is strong!
> He suffers, but he will not suffer long;
> He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong.
> For him nor moves the loud world's random mock,
> Nor all Calamity's hugest waves confound,
> Who seems a promontory of rock,
> That, compass'd round with turbulent sound,
> In middle ocean meets the surging shock,
> Tempest-buffeted, citadel-crown'd.[12]

[12] "Will."

Life is a fight; it is a fight for virtue, and the glory of virtue is not only to fight and to struggle but the eternal glory, which is really something higher than glory, of forever going on:

> Glory of Virtue, to fight, to struggle, to right the wrong—
> Nay, but she aim'd not at glory, no lover of glory she;
> Give her the glory of going on, and still to be.[13]

But now, if life is not worth the having unless one can believe in the freedom of the human will as from the Divine, what is the best and highest evidence on which such a faith may rest? that is, when one is driven to extremities by the hard materialistic facts of this present world, what is the ultimate experience from which no higher appeal can be made? Tennyson says that if material facts and the colder parts of reason would urge us to "believe no more,"

> A warmth within the breast would melt
> The freezing reason's colder part,
> And like a man in wrath the heart
> Stood up and answer'd "I have felt."[14]

That is, after facts and reason have been given due recognition there is an experience that goes beyond these, an experience that fact and knowledge cannot modify and can never repudiate. But what is this experience? Simply nothing other than a *volitional feeling*—the mystical experience we have already described, "the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words:"

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[13] "Wages."

[14] "In Memoriam," Poem, CXXIV.

> And what I am beheld again
> What is, and no man understands;
> And out of darkness came the hands
> That reach thro' nature, moulding men.[14]

No man can ever understand how the "I am" can behold the "what is," how they can call to each other and hear the calls, and how the latter can mould the former; but so it is written in the tablets of the heart and so it is forever. And this stone that has been cast aside by the builders has become the head of the corner. This is the experience from which there is no higher appeal—the *feeling act,* namely, that man is free and immortal and that he is under lasting obligation to exercise his freedom for his own salvation and for the salvation of the race. It is this experience and this alone that denies agnosticism, fatalism, and determinism and all other hard and negative isms whatsoever. It is this experience and this alone that forever denies the absolute reign of mechanical and impersonal law, and it is only as a miracle that we can conceive free-will and law working harmoniously together in this world. This is Tennyson's mediation between fact and faith.

In his remarkable essay on Tennyson Professor Dowden says in substance that the idea of law enters largely into Tennyson's poetry, and he is right; that mysticism does not enter in overmuch, and he again is right, though only in a certain sense; and that Tennyson depends chiefly "on a great development of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge" for the future redemption of the race, which is a blunder on the part of our critic. About the time Tennyson wrote the first "Locksley Hall," it is true, he did entertain great hopes for the race on the

[14] "In Memoriam," Poem, CXXIV.

basis of scientific knowledge. But surely some allowance should be made for his youth; for the man, who penned the one hundred and fourteenth poem of "In Memoriam," not in the first blush of youth nor yet in the dotage of old age but in the very prime of life, squarely denies the position taken by our critic. There he says that knowledge "cannot fight the fear of death," that "she is the second, not the first," and that, cut loose from love and faith, she is "but some wild Pallas from the brain of demons." No, the man who wrote this poem in his mature years certainly cannot be charged with putting his trust in scientific knowledge for the redemption of the race. To be sure it is quite true that one of the central ideas with Tennyson is that of "self-reverence, self-knowledge, and self-control." But why should a man exercise self-reverence if it is not because there is something really miraculous inside him which demands his reverence? And is not the power of self-control also based on the miracle of free-will? And is not therefore self-knowledge a knowledge of the mysterious in us, and an order of knowledge wholly different from scientific knowledge? There is no doubt that Tennyson held that the development of wider scientific knowledge will accompany the self-development of the will and the increase of freedom. But the all-important thing to see is that scientific knowledge is to be only an accompaniment and by no means the cause that shall bring greater self-control and broader freedom to the race of the future. This is a most vital distinction.

It is quite true, as has been stated, that in his early life Tennyson put great faith in scientfic knowledge; and it is also true that through all his life he felt under obligation to give that knowledge the most favorable hearing and to square his experience with it—not to "make his

judgment blind." But if in his career of many years there is any change in his attitude toward truth and life represented in his poetry, that change is this: that, whereas in the first "Locksley Hall" he based his optimistic faith on scientific knowledge and man's determination to move forward, in "In Memoriam" he questioned and criticised the scientific basis and found it wanting, and placed correspondingly more emphasis on the living will of man as the true basis; and lastly in the "Locksley Hall" of his old age he repudiated the scientific basis and accepted the basis of man's power of acting as a free moral agent. In the latter poem his faith is practically as optimistic as in the earlier poem but the basis upon which that optimism rests has swung from scientific knowledge to man's power and freedom simply to follow light and do the right. For, in this latter poem he asks:

> Is it well that while we range with Science,
> glorying in the Time,
> City children soak and blacken soul and sense
> in city slime?

No, it is not well; but if man, instead of ranging with Science, learn to trust in his own freedom and in God there is as much as ever to be hoped for. Before earth can gain her heavenly-best, man must learn to keep the foutain of his will from being poisoned and a "God must mingle with the game:"

> Ere she [Earth] gain her heavenly-best, a God must
> mingle with the game.
> Nay, there may be those about us whom we neither
> see nor name,
>
> Felt within us as ourselves, the Powers of Good,
> the Powers of Ill,
> Strewing balm, or shedding poison in the fountains
> of the will.

In the development of Tennyson's faith the pendulum has swung slowly but surely from faith in scientific knowledge to faith in the fact that "man is man and master of his fate."

The faith of Tennyson was a "compound of many simples" and as a faith it was, for poetical reasons as well as religious, a thousand times better than no faith. It was a faith of his time and served him and many of his generation well; and because of its many-sidedness and compromising nature as well as for its manly strength, it serves persons of a certain type very well to this day. But its limitations and shortcomings are only too evident. The thing to be pointed out here, however, is that, whether for praise or for blame, it was mediating rather than creative. Its chief weakness lies in this: to conceive free-will as based purely on miracle and to conceive law as based on fixed mechanism, and then to bring these two conceptions into the world of common sense side by side, has a tendency to arouse one's sense of contradiction. Sometimes the poet, in his insistence on miraculous free-will flies straight in the face of mechanical law, and again in his insistence on mechanical law he flies straight in the face of free-will. It is a perilous path he pursues, and one must not penetrate too far below the surface if one does not wish to become conscious of the anomaly of miracle and fact jostling each other so closely in the world of common sense. See, for instance, how Carlyle deals with this same formula. Carlyle carries not merely the idea of free-will, but mechanical law, law of custom, and facts great and small, into the realm of the miraculous and the wonderful. "There is," he says, "an infinite significance in fact." Is it the fact of time? It is a "veritable miracle." Is it as insignificant a fact as the stretching forth of your hand? He says: "Were

it not miraculous, could I stretch forth my hand, and clutch the Sun? Yet thou seest me daily stretch forth my hand, and therewith clutch many a thing, and swing it hither and thither. Art thou a grown baby, then, to fancy that the miracle lies in miles of distance, or in pounds avoirdupois of weight; and not to see that the true inexplicable God-revealing Miracle lies in this, that I can stretch forth my hand at all; that I have a free force to clutch aught therewith?"[15] With Carlyle the whole world is all miracle. Whatever one may think of this conception and its implications, the conception itself gives a unified attitude toward the world, and the author of it possesses the constructive and creative mind. But Tennyson, even in such an impassioned and freedom ringing poem as "De Profundis" feels that he must stand with one foot on "changeless law" and with the other on freedom. In English poetry Tennyson is the great compromiser between many views, the great mediator between facts and visions, between materialistic truth and religious truth, between personal freedom and impersonal law.

[15] "Sartor Resartus,' Bk. III, Chap. VIII.

CHAPTER VIII

TENNYSON: ART AND LAW.

This principle of mediation had a wide influence on Tennyson's art ideals and art powers. It produced, for example, a large number of phrases and compound words that attempt to state a medium position and that are characteristically Tennysonian. Such as, "finite-infinite," "numerable-innumerable," "mystic middle state," "new things and old co-twisted," "half-reveal and half-conceal," "not like to like but like in difference," "the falsehood of extremes," "changed by still degrees," "not swift nor slow to change," "manhood fused with female grace," "in my grief a strength reserved," "souls that balance joy and pain," "oh, sweet and bitter in a breath," "I falter where I firmly trod," "and faintly trust the larger hope," "equal-poised control," "man can half-control his doom,"—and this list might be indefinitely enlarged.

This mediating principle not only produced Tennysonian phrases that attempt to express both sides of a truth at once, but it had a moulding power on the larger aspects of his thought, and produced certain mechanical qualities of style. The incident in which an English statesman in the interests of conservatism, quoted the passage which speaks of England as a land of settled government, "where freedom broadens slowly down from precedent to precedent," and in which he was answered by another

statesman, who, in the interests of liberalism, quoted the passage which speaks of Victorian statesmen "who knew the seasons when to take occasion by the hand and make the bounds of freedom wider yet,"—this incident illustrates the balanced way in which Tennyson expresses the opposite sides of a subject and yet "avoids the falsehood of extremes." He sings the deeds of war, but is an advocate of peace. He expresses the "calm despair and wild unrest" that alternately possessed his heart at the death of his friend, yet he counts it "crime to mourn for any over-much." He would offset meditation with action, and would balance religious fervor with skeptical wisdom. It is very difficult to state his views on any subject, because there are so many modifications to make. And a large part of Tennyson's practice of polishing his verse, was the practice of making it say more precisely the qualifying and compromising thing he had in mind. This practice, which, on the mental side, is mechanical rather than spontaneous, accounts in a large measure for the mechanical qualities of style in his work of which many readers complain. Take, for instance, the following stanza from the eighty-fifth poem of "In Memoriam:"

> I woo your love: I count it crime
> To mourn for any overmuch;
> I, the divided half of such
> A friendship as had master'd Time.

The poetry that qualifies the amount of mourning one is to allow himself, and that divides a friendship into two equal parts, certainly tends to be mechanical rather than spontaneous and creative.

There is, perhaps, no phrase more common in Tennyson than the phrase "more and more" with its numerous variations. Everything in the universe is produced

by slow degrees, and Tennyson doubts not that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs." It follows that nothing in the world can be static, and also that nothing can be suddenly transformed. This scientific conception has a powerful influence on Tennyson's ethics of art. By this principle he cannot send his characters as deeply into the valley of soul making as he otherwise could. A character is not made, or should not be made, in the instant, by some powerful birth-pang. This is not the way of "changing by still degrees." A character may give vent to wild and almost hysterical passion, but he does not come out of a critical experience radically different from what he was at entering, except by slow degrees. Though the progress of individuals and of mankind depends on the miracle of man's free-will, yet the miracle must work itself out by an orderly progression. It is pleasing to the fancy to perceive lines of progression radiating everywhere through the universe, and the scientific mind can enjoy the poetry that reflects these progressions. Yet the ultimate effect of this conception is to limit the art powers of the imagination. It tends, for instance, to hamper the imagination when it is engaged in creating a great character undergoing a sudden and profound spiritual transformation.

But this principle of mediating between the fact of scientific materialism and the fact of mystical and religious faith had a deeper influence on Tennyson's art than the influences we have thus far been considering. Tennyson, we have seen, was a genuine mystic who found the substance of faith in the miracle of free-will and in the direct personal experience it can have of God. But in his efforts to meet the scientific facts and not ignore the scientific postulates of his day, he surrendered the external world of nature to mechanical law, and the world

of plant and animal life as well as the outer world of man to the same law for the most part, although he recognized that God had begun to fulfill himself in all the doings of man. And in this surrender he was robbed of much poetical material for the expression of his mystical nature.

In the case of Wordsworth we have seen that all this was appropriated to use in his poetry. Although Wordsworth renounced the highest mystical experiences which go beyond the power of concrete representation, he found that everywhere in all the world of eye and ear there were living pulsations. Joining these to the power of memory and the moral idea, he constructed a new synthesis, investing it with the mystery of vital movement and literally producing a creation. This creation has at once solid substance and intense idealizations. "All the mighty world of eye and ear—both what they half-create and what perceive," all the highest powers of man, all the simplest qualities of a child, go into the making of this synthesis. Wordsworth made all these forces subservient to his experiences in the immediate present; so that this half-objective and half-created world, possessing deep correspondences of the inner and the outer life, and shot through with mystical tendencies, was not a mere fanciful fabrication but was in substance the very breath of his life, the very stuff of his being. If Wordsworth is robbed of this synthesis he is robbed of the props upon which his life and experience rest. Wordsworth was a genuine mystic poet.

It would naturally be supposed that Tennyson, who was equally susceptible to mystical and religious influences and who was as inveterate a lover of nature as Wordsworth, would make a somewhat similar constructive or creative use of the mystical experiences in the realm of external nature, that he would use the objects

and powers of external nature as the embodiment and means of expression of his mystical consciousness. Not so, however. The age of Tennyson was too wise; the world of the senses must be surrendered to the category of mechanical law. It required nothing short of the strongest and highest creative power to make plastic and to pour into an original poetic mould the vast store of raw facts and the stern laws which men deduced from them in the age of Tennyson. Susceptible as he was to scientific facts, Tennyson could not, if he would, take in the great outer world of eye and ear and spiritualize it until the whole should flow, as it were, through him in dilating measure of regenerative moral and religious power. No, the terrible specter of mechanical law, of an evolutionary unfoldment widening "with the process of the suns," of a principle of natural selection with its possiblities of chance happenings and its direful disclosures of "Nature red in tooth and claw,"—this spectre, dread and austere, stood like a two-handed engine "ready to smite once and smite no more" the naivetè and simple dignity of a Wordsworthian conception of nature. So that Tennyson was a mystic without the natural medium for the expression of his mystical consciousness.

There were, nevertheless, a number of things left to do in the direction of external nature. The first was to treat the world of our immediate sensations not as an organic whole instinct with vitality and power but to treat those sensations in their varying and beautiful physiological manifestations as an ornament to poetry. And Tennyson never wearies in describing the shifting scenes of sea and wave, and sky and cloud, and wood and wold, and leaf and bud, with a hand that surpasses the cunning of all other hands, whatsoever. Another thing to do was to make nature reflect, in a fanciful way, the varying moods

of man's temper or to make her take on whatever mood the poet wished to give her. And a third was to treat those sensations that come to us from the distant horizon of things and that lie beyond the realm of scientfic analysis as mystical manifestations of divinity, messengers of a higher life of freedom, immortality, and God; for,

> On the glimmering limit far withdrawn,
> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.[1]

Just as there are two orders of memory in Tennyson, —the memory of every day things and the memory of more than mortal things,—so there are two orders of sensations—the sensations of ordinary life and nature around us and the sensations that come from the "high land" that "ranges above the region of the wind" and that extends

> Thro' all the silent spaces of the worlds,
> Beyond all thought into the heaven of heavens.[2]

In Wordsworth there was only one order of memory and one order of sensations. For Wordsworth grasps the things of memory and sensation at a point where they are but a part of an universal and spiritualized whole. This indicates that Wordsworth is a more thorough-going and a more profound mystic than Tennyson, and that Tennyson, on the other hand, is a more popular mystic. For it requires at once the strength of the whole mind to grasp Wordsworth's universals; while the common-sense element in us responds to Tennyson's every day memories and sensations and the fanciful element in us responds to his mystic gleams. More readers can follow

[1] "The Vision of Sin."
[2] "The Princess," Conclusion.

Tennyson with ease than Wordsworth. Tennyson appeals especially to a matter-of-fact mind endowed with a lively fancy.

The facts we have been considering in this chapter also explain why Tennyson, perhaps more than any other modern poet, has made use of what Ruskin calls the "pathetic fallacy." Near the close of his own treatment of the subject Ruskin says: "I cannot quit the subject without giving two more instances, both exquisite, of the pathetic fallacy, which I have come upon in 'Maud;'" and had he looked further in "Maud" he would have found many more instances to hand:

> All night have the roses heard
> The flute, violin, bassoon;
> All night has the casement jessamine stirred
> To the dancers dancing in tune.

Of course, the roses did not hear the music, nor did the jessamine respond to the dancing in fact, nor did hundreds of other natural objects Tennyson mentions in this and other poems do in fact what he says they do. The explanation of why Tennyson makes the roses listen to the music does not lie in the fact, as some persons have thought, that the speaker in the poem tends to be somewhat hysterical and is carried away by his feelings. For Tennyson makes frequent use of the same method in poems where the speaker is not supposed to be hysterical, as in numerous cases in "In Memoriam." Nor does Ruskin's explanation that the poet feels strongly, thinks weakly, and sees untruly, either go to the root of the matter or do justice to Tennyson.

The explanation why Tennyson uses the pathetic fallacy extensively lies in the facts we have already hinted, the facts, first, that he was an unusually great lover of

nature, and second, that he conceived the inner forces of nature as a lifeless piece of machinery, and thirdly, that his poetic fancy was always strong and active. He would describe accurately the objects of nature in their physiological beauty. He would boldly and deliberately adopt the poetic method of making the objects of nature, which for him had no imaginative or spiritual life, reflect or take on fancifully whatever mood he chose to give them. He would use them purely as a convention in art, and would have it understood that no one is to be so foolish as to suppose that the rose really heard any music or the jessamine stirred to the dancing. He would set his human characters in the most beautiful natural surroundings and in that kind of nature environment that, by analogy and only by analogy, would be most directly in harmony with the moods or the spiritual experiences of his character. When, in "In Memoriam," he wishes to express the feeling of "calm despair," he surrounds us with the atmosphere of an unusually calm day; when he wishes to express the 'wild unrest that lives in woe" he surrounds us with a night of high winds, curling waters, and cracking forests. Two lines from the thirtieth poem and two lines from the seventy-eigth poem of "In Memoriam" set side by side will illustrate his method:

> A *rainy cloud* possess'd the earth,
> And *sadly* fell our Christmas-eve.
>
> The *silent snow* possess'd the earth,
> And *calmly* fell our Christmas-eve.

Not only do his calms and storms, and his clouds and snows help to reflect and express the human mood, but very often his "rose weeps" and his "lily whispers" and both his rose and lily once lay awake all night sighing for the coming of the dawn and a woman. It is not that

Tennyson thinks weakly or sees untruly, but it is simply that he has deliberately chosen objects of nature that he loved as a vehicle of expression, a mode of representing the human feelings.

The justification for this method is that it is a legitimate convention of art, and that it made Tennyson succeed better than he could have succeeded in any other way. He succeeded in retaining and reflecting to the full in his poetry the wondrous physiological beauty in which our world is clothed. He retained, too, a strict regard for the scientific laws and the scientific postulates of his day, which were something like ultimate truths to him. He may not have believed absolutely that nature is soulless, for Tennyson believed nothing overmuch; but he certainly never allowed himself to say that the Eternal Soul is clothed in a brook with purer robes than those of flesh and blood. He would not outrage the scientific formula so flagrantly. And in his insistent use of the convention of making nature reflect the moods of man he succeeded in showing new uses to which the convention can be put. Within the limits of these ideals in the treatment of nature Tennyson has never been surpassed, and, it is safe to say, will never be superseded.

There are, however, objections to this art, for it does not represent the highest nor the deepest way to treat nature. One objection is that this kind of treatment becomes tiresome. When King Lear is driven out into the night and made shelterless by his daughters it is no doubt a fine stroke of the artist to make the night rage with a tempest at the point of time where the tempest in Lear's breast has reached the limit. But if Shakespeare thereupon were to create a physical tempest every time his hero experiences a conflict in his soul the art would become tedious, and the convention obtrusive. Because a thing

is successful in art once, is not a sufficient warrant that it may be used repeatedly. And this is the weakness in Tennyson as regards the convention in question.

But there is a still deeper objection to this art. In his zeal for scientific truth and respect for scientific postulates Tennyson lost rather than gained for art power and art truth. He surrendered too easily to the spectre of mechanical law. In a world where a man has free and creative power it is not well to surrender too easily to such postulates as fixed mechanism and rigidity of law, for they are at best but postulates. It cannot be known whether nature has a soul or whether she has not. But a poet, one thinks, ought to take advantage of the doubt and give her one. In a world where a man can, if he chooses, turn a swamp or a bog into a beautiful lake and transform its shores into a loveliness that makes the weary seek it for rest and peace, it certainly ought to be admitted that a poet can make similar and far more wonderful transformations in the art of poetry. No man will die for a dogma or a postulate. But men must have life, and it is the business of a poet "to come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,"—passionate, volitional, and imaginative life. A poet, in the interests of this life, must create it where he does not find it and must reclaim the "waste places" of existence, and make them, if they do not so naturally, breathe out the spirit of life and the spirit of God.

We saw that Wordsworth attempted to substitute absolute reality for the imagination so called, and partially failed. He makes too great claim for the vision of absolute reality and does not allow enough for the free play of fancy. Tennyson seems to err on the other side. He does not claim enough for the creative and informing power of the imagination. He permits it to be tethered

and hemmed in by scientific law and postulate, and escapes more often into the world of fancy than is either necessary or desirable for the highest art power and art truth. He is too ready to admit that our little systems have their day and cease to be, too ready to admit that man

> Knows himself no vision to himself
> Nor the high God a vision;[3]

too ready to admit that these things are beyond the power of imagination and pictorial art. Tennyson never quite bursts out in the full-orbed power of imaginative vision.

Yet the deepest source of imaginative and creative freedom does not lie mainly in the artist's treatment of the external world, but in his treatment of the mind of man. No poet of any considerable power, not even Wordsworth, would claim to be first of all a poet of external nature. He would claim to be a poet of human nature. The deepest question is not, How has he treated external nature? but, How has he treated the mind of man,—its spiritual powers, its largeness of soul, its sorrows and its hopes, its fulness of life, its freedom? And Tennyson treated the human mind and human character well. He presented many notable character studies. Ulysses, Tithonus, Guinevere, and a host of others, speak absolutely for themselves. He said well many things about the varying moods of man's temper. He portrayed, with beauty and power, many of the aspects of his own inner and deeper experiences. And he always clung to the fact of the inward greatness of the mind—its freedom and immortal power, power on its own acts and on the world.

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[3] "The Holy Grail."

CHAPTER IX

BROWNING AND HIS TIMES.

Among English poets Browning is the greatest psychologist of human souls, not of all kinds and types of souls but of those chiefly that are charged with vast passion and boundless energy and will, souls at bottom much like the soul of Browning himself. How these souls combined the finite with the infinite in their experiences; how they "with the narrow mind, must cram inside their finite God's infinitude;" how they aspired and attained or how they aspired and failed; how they made their choices in the greatest and most serious crises of their lives, when alternatives of vast importance presented themselves on the instant, when a wrong choice was fraught with the most dire consequences and when the right choice involved the greatest gain both from the world finite and the world infinite, when there was a clear inner consciousness of absolute freedom in making a choice;—how these souls then and thus made their choices and exercised their wills is the inspiring theme of the major and more enduring part of Browning's poetry.

With this central idea as the burden of his poetry it will be seen at once that the scientific postulates which obtained generally in the days of Browning and with which Tennyson mediated so valiantly all his life, were of little importance to the mind of Browning. Browning did not ignore the scientific facts of the age, but he subordinated the facts of science to matters of infinitely greater

concern and made them but a single and unimportant stone in his edifice of life and truth. It has already been suggested that the scientific postulates of Browning's day are but postulates, and as such can be disposed of in more ways than one. Take, for instance, the postulate of law based on the idea of mechanism and see how Carlyle deals with it: "But is it not the deepest Law of Nature that she be constant?" cries an illuminated class: "Is not the Machine of the Universe fixed to move by unalterable rules?" And Carlyle's answer in part is: "Laplace's book on the Stars, wherein he exhibits that certain Planets, with their Satellites, gyrate round our worthy Sun, at a rate and in a course, which, by greatest good fortune, he and the like of him have succeeded in detecting,—is to me as precious as to another. But is this what thou namest 'Mechanism of the Heavens,' and 'System of the World;' this, wherein Sirius and the Pleiades, and all Herschel's Fifteen-thousand Suns per minute, being left out, some paltry handful of Moons, and inert Balls had been—looked at, nicknamed, and marked in the Zodiacal Way-bill; so that we can now prate of their Whereabout; their How, their Why, their What, being hid from us, as in the signless Inane?

"System of Nature! To the wisest man, wide as is his vision, Nature remains of quite *infinite* depth, of quite infinite expansion; and all Experience therof limits itself to some few computed centuries, and measured square-miles. The course of Nature's phases, on this our little fraction of a Planet, is partially known to us: but who knows what deeper courses these depend on; what infinitely larger Cycle (of causes) our little Epicycle revolves on? To the Minnow every cranny and pebble, and quality and accident, of its little native Creek may have become familiar: but does the Minnow under-

stand the Ocean Tides and periodic Currents, the Trade-winds, and Monsoons, and Moon's Eclipses; by all which the condition of its little Creek is regulated, and may, from time to time (*un*-miraculously enough) be quite overset and reversed? Such a Minnow is man; his Creek this Planet Earth; his Ocean the immeasurable All; his Monsoons and periodic Currents the mysterious Course of Providence through Æons of Æons."[1] This is the characteristic way of Carlyle. To one who is anxious to know whether the mechanical law which obviously obtains in the heavens is the "ultimate angels' law," Carlyle says that it may be the ultimate law or it may not be. He refers one to the fact of the "infinite depth" and the "infinite expansion" of Nature, the "signless inane," the "immeasurable All," and the Mysterious Course of Providence," admonishes one to cease prating about things one cannot understand, to possess one's soul in silence, and above all to wonder and to worship.

Now Browning's way of dealing with the "never-changing Law" of the external universe is not only profoundly characteristic of Browning but shows him in his proper contrast to Carlyle in one sense and to Tennyson in another. With Browning this mechanism of the heavens is not a thing especially to wonder at as with Carlyle, nor yet a dead thing given over to blind forces as with Tennyson, but it is a machinery to give the soul its proper bent:

> He [God] fixed thee 'mid this dance
> Of plastic circumstance,
> This Present, thou, forsooth, would fain arrest:
> Machinery just meant
> To give thy soul its bent,
> Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.[2]*

[1] "Sartor Resartus," Bk. III, Chap. VIII.

[2] "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

* See note 6, Appendix.

"The starry state of the broad skies" is but "needful furniture for life's first stage:"

> What was the world, the starry state
> Of the broad skies,—what, all displays
> Of power and beauty intermixed,
> Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—
> What else than needful furniture
> For life's first stage?[3]

Though the mechanism of the heavens which is to help life in its first stages can by no means be the "ultimate angels' law," it still serves another purpose besides giving the soul its proper bent. It serves as a screen to ward off somewhat the inundations of God's inflow of power and love and will which would otherwise be too great for man to bear. Just as Moses of old could not see God face to face but must needs draw a veil over his face, so the visible creation is meant to hide God's effulgence sufficiently for man to remain alive:

> Naked belief in God, the Omnipotent,
> Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much
> The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.
> It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.
> Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth;
> I say it's meant to hide him all it can.[4]

In our highest and ideal moments our volitional and passionate natures, our instincts and intuitions suddenly rising into consciousness, demand for their highest satisfaction a correspondence or communion with a Being outside ourselves, a Being with a far greater yearning to commune with us than we have to commune with Him, a Being, in short, with infinite and boundless yearning,

[3] "Easter Day."
[4] "Bishop Blougram's Apology."

and with infinite and boundless energy of will. And for the satisfaction of our higher soul states Browning has created the situation in which there is such a Being, and then has interposed the visible creation between that Being and ourselves in order to allay the ecstasy of his communing power with us and bring the communion itself within our ability to endure. This indeed is a radical conception. It explains in part why Browning has been called a barbarian, why he has been charged with confusing our sense of reason and confounding the very commonest of our logical thoughts. Because Wordsworth conceived the external universe invested with moral power and had felt that power flow through himself and through all things, he has been charged with building up a factitious synthesis, with subverting the facts of everyday life into strange and mystic presences. But Browning is more radical than Wordsworth. Wordsworth conceived the outward show of sky and earth as a good conductor through which the moral power of the Eternal Being might flow into the heart of man. Browning had the audacity to conceive this same external machinery as a bad conductor, so that the inflow of power and love should not be overwhelmingly great and destructive.

In the interests of volitional and passionate life we have attempted to justify Wordsworth's delight in the "volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe" and his principle of creating them where he did not find them. And if one should be asked why not on this same basis justify, if not the greater originality, at least the greater audacity of Browning, the answer must be: most certainly he is to be justified. Was it not Portia in the "Merchant of Venice" who felt the dilating excess of Love to such a degree that she prayed,

O love, be moderate; allay thy ecstasy;
In measure rain thy joy; scant this excess;
I feel too much thy blessing: make it less,
For fear I surfeit;—

and do not all the greater souls of great literature not only dilate with this intensity of passion and energy of power, but also make the objects about them dilate with the same passion and power? Did not the Christ of the Hebrew Scriptures come that he might fill life to overflowing, and did he not have a constant vision of the Face of his Father shining through the visible face of the universe? And are then the art of Shakespeare and the religion of Christ false because they contain these conceptions? They are rather eternally true because by these conceptions they rise to the highest possible demands the human heart can ever make upon them. In fact, Wordsworth's theory about intuitions, passions and volitions, which lies at the basis of these conceptions, is a true one; and Browning is in no idle sense the fulfillment of some of Wordsworth's deepest prophetic utterances concerning the future of poetry. This point is so important that it will be taken up later at a different angle. It has been cited here merely to show Browning's artistic and religious attitude toward external nature and toward the scientific spirit of his times.

Again, let us take the idea of time which so filled the soul of Carlyle with wonder and so enamoured the imagination of Tennyson. Wordsworth's and Tennyson's conceptions of time were very much alike. They both conceived God as transcending the order of time; they both thought that "our weakness somehow shapes the shadow, Time," and that in our very highest moments of experience we can transcend it. But Tennyson is very much more emphatic than Wordsworth on the idea that

with the Nameless there are no 'Thens' and 'Whens' but only an "Eternal Now," and he is also far more deeply impressed with the mere immensity of time's range and with what may be accomplished by the race in time, even though time itself is shaped by our own weaknesses. Now, to Browning the idea that time may possibly be a subjective phenomenon is no argument against its reality; it cannot for that reason be a mere shadow. Nothing is shadowy that comes out of the brain of man because man himself is a creative soul and therein shows himself like God, being only a little lower in the scale. And a single moment of experience in the soul's action may be so infinitely important that the moment is infinity itself. Browning "crams" and "packs" so much of the infinite into the finite that there remains no great difference between the two; the infinite is but an extension of the momentous finite. Browning is not impressed by the mere fact of extended time even though it stretch beyond any power of measurement; time is only of interest so far as it has to do with the making of a soul.

Thus, the scientific postulates of law based on mechanism, the mechanical nature of the external universe, and the immensity of time, all of which pressed Tennyson so hard in his attempt to hold to a personal faith, were completely subordinated by Browning to interests of greater concern and became indeed only an unimportant stone in his edifice of life and truth. And the spirit of the times served Browning not so much in giving him new material to work on as in offering him a foil upon which to react, and then to build independently his own creative structure. Outwardly, at least, this seems true. In the deepest sense, however, it may be that Browning is far more vitally related to the inner spirit of his times than even Tennyson. The age in which we are living is

as much a scientific age as that of Tennyson and Browning. We are as of old hungering and thirsting for scientific facts. The laboratories of our universities are resounding with the word of fact more persistently than ever, and hopes are still entertained to outdo Nature at last and force her to give up her secrets. Science, in the words of Browning, even now

> Encourages the meanest who has racked
> Nature until he gains from her some fact,
> To state what truth is from his point of view,
> Mere pin-point though it be.[5]

But however vast the scientific edifice of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may become, however brilliant may be our discoveries of facts as a result of both physical and psychical research, it will no doubt remain true that the highest demands of the soul shall not be satisfied by anything found in this edifice or in the facts which go into its building, and that the counter tendency shall be to augment the soul's demand for "peace, plenty, and power" which is so strongly expressed by the popular literature of the day that plumes itself as being scientific but is at heart transcendental and mystical; and that, as in the course of time the limitations of scientific fact and scientific truth shall become more clearly demonstrated, this mystical tendency which is at present somewhat blindly stirring the common heart of humanity shall flow out into a broader sea than has hitherto been known in the history of the world; in which day it shall be seen that in strictly modern times Tennyson, with his insistence on "the mighty hopes that make us men," was the first faint voice of this spirit, and that Browning, with his insistence that the "ultimate angels' law" is that of

[5] "Francis Furini, Parleyings with."

> Indulging every instinct of the soul
> There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing—*

was the first full-throated voice of that spirit and was for that reason the true representative of the inner life and spirit of his time and generation. Who can say?

Since we have now seen Browning's relation to the spirit of his times, let us consider briefly what were the essential qualities of his character. No one but a critic who supposes that Browning was first of all a philosopher and that his intellectual casuistry was the most important thing about him would deny the statement that Browning possessed the deepest of literary passion and sensitiveness. Those of us who believe him to have been a poet first of all believe him to have possessed the poetic passion in the highest degree accompanied with the utmost richness in sensitive response to color and sight and all objects of sense. Take, for instance, a passage (one out of hundreds of similar passages from his poetry) from "The Last Ride Together" and see how the poet expresses an intense inner passion joined with exquisite sensitiveness to the power and beauty and glory of the outer world of sense:

> Hush! if you saw some western cloud
> All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
> By many benedictions—sun's
> And moon's and evening star's at once—
> And so, you, looking and loving best,
> Conscious grew, your passion drew
> Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
> Down on you, near and yet more near,
> Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—
> Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!
> Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

* "A Death in the Desert."

This is not at all sensual, but richly sensuous, and spiritual. The passion is outspoken and powerful. The passions in Browning are elemental, exuberant, and swelling. There are not many undertones and gradations in them. In such a poem as "Love among the Ruins" the passion runs in an almost subconscious undercurrent, while the lover is descanting on his surroundings. But in the climax of the poem the passion suddenly becomes aware of itself, and bursts out full-blown, strong, too full even to speak, producing a powerful effect:

> When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
> Either hand
> On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
> Of my face,
> Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
> Each on each.

There are no fine shadings, no secondary qualities of the passion given. The passion is deeply impulsive and energetic, primary and fundamental, and is not worldly-wise. All this is truly characteristic of Browning in both his works and his life.

What is true of Browning's passion is also true of his sense perceptions, especially those of color. He has an eye for primary colors, and especially those that are stimulating to the senses—red and green, yellow and blue. In "Love Among the Ruins" the "domed and daring palace shot its spires up like fires," red and gorgeous; and there never was such plenty and perfection of green grass elsewhere. The girl, too, had "eager eyes and yellow hair"—yellow like those of Porphyria, "one long yellow string" of hair. In "Home-Thoughts, from the Sea" the "sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay," and Trafalgar lay "bluish 'mid the burning waters." In "De Gustibus—" Browning speaks of "the

great opaque blue breadth of sea without a break." A rich profusion of colors, primary and massive, Browning gives in his poetry.

Joined to this predilection for the fundamental passions in man and to this sensitiveness to primary colors and sights in nature, there was in Browning a quick, volitional, muscular alertness of the eye that saw all the sharp angles and forms of every object at once. In "Easter Day" he calls attention to the "enwrapping rocky niche" in which the lizard sleeps; in "By the Fireside" to the ferns that "fit their teeth to the polished block" and to the "fairy-cupped elf-needled mat of moss;" and in "De Gustibus —" to "one sharp tree" that is "red-rusted, rough iron-spiked," and to a castle that is "precipice-encurled, in a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine." It may be said that Browning's infinite has very hard work to get itself realized in so angular and sharply defined a finite as his. Or, that his finite must aspire with great aspiration toward the infinite to be absorbed in it. It may be said, too, that this keenness of sight for the sharp forms in nature joined with a certain nimbleness of mind accounts in a large measure for Browning's intellectual and analytical fame of traditional criticism.

Browning was such a veritable fighter all his days that it seems superfluous to state that he possessed an unusual tenacity of will and great moral and spiritual energy. The following passage from "Rabbi Ben Ezra" might well serve as a text for Browning's whole life:

> Then, welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
> Be our joys three-parts pain!
> Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
> Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

And the last thing he wrote proves that he kept up his victorious war cry to the very end. There he describes himself as

> One who never turned his back but marched breast
> forward,
> Never doubted clouds would break,
> Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong
> would triumph,
> Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
> Sleep to wake.
>
> No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
> Greet the unseen with a cheer!
> Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
> "Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,—fight on, fare ever
> There as here!"[1]

And on the first of these stanzas Browning himself comments: "It almost looks like bragging to say this, and as if I ought to cancel it; but it's the simple truth; and as it's true, it shall stand." And certainly no one can wish it canceled or doubt its utter sincerity.

It is important to note that though Browning possessed the union of intense passion and energy of will his character did not become immobile and sterile as did that of Wordsworth. The first and main reason for this no doubt is that Browning, contrary to the popular conception of him, was by nature, and remained to the last of his days, genuinely simple and human-hearted. His boundless enthusiasms, which are so characteristic of youth—"half a pang and all a rapture," "all a wonder and a wild desire,"—his unmeasured admiration for Shelley, his intense interest in and defense, both in turn and at the same time, of such men as diverse in their inter-

[1] "Epilogue to Asolando."

ests and views as Thomas Carlyle, Walter Savage Landor, John Ruskin, and John Stuart Mill, his endless curiosity about all things under the sun, his head-long devotion to paints and color and canvas in order to learn at first hand the technicalities of painting, his similar amateur devotions to sculpture and music, his helplessness in putting a sentence into its straightforward and natural order of English, his naive wonder at individuals who seemed to have no capacity to understand his poetry, his plunging into the middle of a Renaissance story or Medieval legend with the expectation that the reader would at once understand all the foregone conclusions—these, and many more things like them, give evidence that Browning was at bottom always delightfully simple and human-hearted. In the days of Wordsworth there was a strong movement toward simplicity, and Wordsworth accepted the movement consciously, and consciously ordered his life on the principle of "plain living and high thinking." Besides, he attained childlike simplicity only as a result of the most important reactionary crisis his life had ever known. The strenuousness and mystic intensity of it tended to harden and solidify his character. He attained to simplicity at the cost of a certain aloofness of character and arbitrariness of decision. In later days when simplicity had run its course the tendency toward complexity and artificiality ran high. And upon this time came the militant, but simple and elemental soul of Browning. Accepting whole-heartedly the life of all classes, in the true spirit of democracy and with the undying enthusiasm of youth, Browning retained naturalness and flexibility, humor and whole-heartedness in his character.

Another reason why Browning's intense passion and energy of will did not solidify and sterilize his character

was that he possessed a genuinely optimistic temper. Browning's optimism, as all men's optimism, no doubt was largely influenced by his temperament. Chesterton says it was wholly due to his temperament. In his book on Browning he says: "Any one will make the deepest and blackest and most incurable mistake about Browning who imagines that his optimism was founded on any argument for optimism." Now this is not the deepest and blackest and most incurable mistake one can make about Browning, just as many other things are not superlatively deep and black and incurable that Chesterton says are superlatively so in that brilliant though highly colored work of his on Browning; yet in this instance there doubtless would be a mistake. But these two things in particular are to be noted, first, that no man ascribes his philosophy of optimism to the conditions of his tempermanent, and second, the number and kind of unusual or extraordinary circumstances that may surround him and the choices he makes in his reactions on them are important and determining factors in his optimism. The great crisis in Wordsworth's life was his reactionary experience with the French Revolution. His soul was plunged into utter despair from the coils of which he slowly wound himself, until at last he could speak with a deep and over-flowing joy of the goodness of life. The great crisis in Tennyson's early life was the death of Arthur Hallam. This fact filled Tennyson's sensitive and imaginative soul with agony and despair, from which state of mind he gradually escaped until he too could speak with assurance that human life in the main is good and sweet and true. The great crisis in Browning's early life was his elopement and marriage with Elizabeth Barrett. And though this was accomplished with the most anxious and serious experiences a man can meet, it immediately re-

sulted in a long series of the deepest and profoundest joys a man can know. Thus from childhood to the age of forty-nine Browning's life was a life of continuous and unbroken joy and optimism. When Browning was forty-nine Elizabeth Barrett Browning died. But a man at forty-nine will meet a calamity differently than at twenty-four. Though the spiritual changes wrought in Browning by this calamity were great, his heart had been steeled for it. And it tended to make him all the more a fighter, unwilling to have his eyes bandaged by death, but anxious to fight "the best and the last," to "taste the whole of it," "to bear the brunt" bravely, as he says in the immortal "Prospice." Wordsworth and Tennyson each had his happiness taken from him in early manhood and slowly each recovered that joy and unity of spirit that a great poet must possess before he can be the mouthpiece of a nation or a race. Browning simply never had that joy and unity of spirit taken from him, and consequently was never compelled to struggle for it strenuously, as were Wordsworth and Tennyson.

Wordsworth based his optimism mainly on the power of the mind to reproduce through memory and will the exalted moments of the past, especially those of childhood, and make them live in the present. Tennyson based his optimism on the miracle of the living will that shall endure and the orderliness of human life in general, with the faith that the power of will and freedom shall be "more and more" in the world. Browning characteristically based his optimism on the continuous and almost infinite energy of passion, on the power of our souls to make their own destiny, and on the fact of the incompleteness of life here below, which latter point, we shall see later, has far reaching consequences. Thus, Browning's simplicity and human-heartedness, his enthusiastic

and optimistic temper which was in harmony with both his theory of optimism and his practical experiences of life, tended to keep his intense passions and energy of will from solidifying and sterilizing themselves, and made it possible for these latter forces to express themselves in such poetry of passion and energy and power as falls short only of the poetry of the greatest masters.

CHAPTER X

BROWNING: PASSION AND WILL.

I

On the question of the freedom of the will, which is the fundamental question at issue in these pages, the attitudes of Wordsworth and Browning respectively are very much alike and stand in contrast to the attitude of Tennyson. Wordsworth held that there is a free creative spirit in all things. Even in the meadow-flower and in the forest-tree this principle of inner self-direction finds expression:

> How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?
> Because the lovely little flower is free
> Down to its root, and, in that freedom, bold;
> And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree
> Comes not by casting in a formal mould,
> But from its *own* divine vitality.[1]

And this principle of universal freedom is in all things, for whatever exists has properties that spread beyond itself—"this is the freedom of the universe." But the "most apparent home" of this freedom is in the mind of man, for even in the hour of defeat we are to "feel that we are greater than we know." Man indeed is "a sensitive being, a *creative* soul."

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[1] "A Poet!—He Hath Put His Heart to School."

Tennyson, on the contrary, would say that the meadow-flower is not free down to its root and there is no special divine vitality in a forest-tree. Much less than in an eagle's wing or an insect's eye can one find the power of divinity in meadow-flowers and forest-trees. All these products of creation are given over to blind forces, fixed and impersonal laws. It is a hard matter indeed to be convinced that the will of man himself is not wholly subject to these same blind and impersonal forces. Tennyson concludes, however, that man's will is free in a measure and in a progressive form; and, in his efforts to determine the limits of its freedom Tennyson reasons on this subject in his verse more directly than either Wordsworth or Browning; that is, on this subject he is more nearly a technical philosopher than Wordsworth or Browning. Wordsworth is filled with the spirit of child-like simplicity; Browning is possessed with the eternal aspirations of youth; Tennyson is wise.

As has been suggested, Browning, like Wordsworth, without attempting to define any limits, makes the assumption of freedom in man boldly and without reserve. But there is this difference in their views; that whereas Wordsworth emphasized the freedom that exists in the external universe along with the freedom in man, Browning emphasized the freedom alone that exists in the soul. For Browning there was no great virtue in the idea as to whether there is freedom or not in the external universe apart from the passions and volitions of man; because the soul, if it acts decisively in the great moments of life that come upon it, finds that this world is peculiarly fitted to its needs:

> How the world is made for each of us!
> How all we perceive and know in it
> Tends to some moment's product thus

When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit—the thing it does![2]

The all-important and all-absorbing thing in this life is what the soul wills to do and what it does; and they are tremendous powers that the soul possesses, and they are far-reaching consequences that it produces. Wordsworth indeed said that the soul is free and has creative power, but Browning emphasized this fact to an unusual degree. For Browning man was only a little lower in the scale than the Being who made him—"a God though in the germ." He "repeats God's process in man's due degree:"

Man, bounded, yearning to be free,
May so project his surplusage of soul
In search of body, so add self to self
By owning what lay ownerless before,—
So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms—
That, although nothing which had never life
Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
Yet, something dead may get to live again,
Something with too much life or not enough,
Which, either way imperfect, ended once:
An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
Completes the incomplete and saves the thing.
....Such man's feat is, in the due degree,
——Mimic creation, galvanism for life,
But still a glory portioned in the scale.[3]

To repeat God's process, to resuscitate, to regenerate, to add self to self, to start the dead alive, to mimic creation, to reclaim the waste places of existence and to clothe them with life and vitality—these are the free and regal powers of the soul. And in the full possession of our god-like powers and the gift of freedom we are to

[2] "By the Fireside."
[3] "The Ring and the Book." Bk. I.

Rejoice we are allied
To that which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive![4]

On a question which may be considered a corollary to the one just discussed, the question of restraint and discipline that the will should exercise upon our lives, the attitude of Browning stands in strong contrast to the attitudes respectively of Wordsworth and Tennyson. In his persistent refusal to sound the tumult as well as the depth of the soul, Wordsworth gained somewhat in self-mastery and lost a great deal in human-heartedness. Tennyson's ideal was that of a man who could live by the 'faith that comes of self-control," a man "wearing the white flower of a blameless life." Wordsworth and Tennyson both felt that there were many tumultuous things in our social and private lives, in the life of the senses, in the life of intellectual liberalism, in the life of spiritual indulgence, upon which our wills should exercise a strenuous self-control and the power of restraint. Now, Browning's robustious nature had little in common with what he considered this "ghastly smooth life, dead at heart:"

And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.[5]

This willingness to be crossed and thwarted as a man, this militant attitude of facing forward and moving for-

[4] "Rabbi Ben Ezra."
[5] "Easter Day."

ward is not only to be highly preferred to an easeful state of lethargy and ghastly smoothness, but it is to be kept up to the very end and to be carried forward by the means of seeking the hardest places and taking no thought of the risks and dangers. Like David the Shepherd Boy, one is to take the hardest place, to refuse heavy and cumbersome armament and to depend on the Lord of Hosts for victory. Like Browning himself, one is to be a fighter:

> I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
> The best and the last!
> I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
> And bade me creep past.
> No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
> The heroes of old,
> Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
> Of pain, darkness and cold.[6]

For, in thus boldly facing the worst in the great crisis, defeat shall suddenly be changed into victory, pain into peace, darkness into light, and light into love which is best:

> For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
> The black minute's at end,
> And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
> Shall dwindle, shall blend,
> Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
> Then a light, then thy breast,
> O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
> And with God be the rest![6]

What though our joys be three parts pain, it is our business here to fight the good fight with joy on our lips and gladness in our souls. And this leads us directly to the heart of Browning's experience with life and his ideas of passion and will.

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[6] "Prospice."

Against Wordsworth's and Tennyson's ideals of self-control and restraint Browning emphasizes what may be called the principle of gain. The chief function of the will in Browning is to exercise itself so as to attain to the greatest possible gain. Let it first be understood that man belongs to two kingdoms—the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth,—and that as long as he is in this life he has no right to renounce either; then the cardinal question with regard to every possible experiment of life is the question of the Bishop in the Apology, "Where's the gain?" And the opposite question of losing is hardly worth considering. "Lose? Talk of loss and I refuse to plead at all," says one of Browning's characters, and this is almost literally true of Browning himself. His scheme of life is a scheme of endless addition. "Let essence, whatsoe'er it be, extend—never contract:"

> I say that man was made to grow, not stop;
> That help he needed once, and needs no more,
> Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:
> For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.
> This imports solely, man should mount on each
> New height in view; the help whereby he mounts,
> The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,
> Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.
> Man apprehends him newly at each stage
> Whereat earth's ladder drops, its service done;
> And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.[7]

Let man never cease striving, but ever aspire, and all things shall be his. And the "all things" of Browning are really inclusive. "There shall never be one lost good:"

> What entered into thee,
> *That* was, is, and shall be.[8]

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[7] "A Death in the Desert."

[8] "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

Is it a question of those immature instincts and aspirations that rise up in us so beautifully in youth and tend to die away in the light of later experiences, or of those thoughts and escaped fancies which do not mature into words or substantial acts? They shall all help to swell the man's amount and count in the final and ultimate estimate of his worth:

> All instincts immature,
> All purposes unsure,
> That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:
>
> Thoughts hardly to be packed
> Into a narrow act,
> Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
> All I could never be,
> All, men ignored in me,
> This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.[9]

Likewise the temptations of life exist but to give the soul a chance to be triumphant:

> Why comes temptation but for man to meet
> And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
> And so be pedestalled in triumph?[10]

And doubts and unbelief are conditions that help faith to steady its nerves and stand calm in its victory:

> Faith means perpetual unbelief
> Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
> Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.[11]

Similarly is it with falsehood. Though we are to fight falsehood to the death we are not to make the very

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[9] "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

[10] "The Ring and the Book." The Pope.

[11] "Bishop Blougram's Apology."

serious mistake of supposing that no truth is mixed with falsehood. On the contrary, there is truth at the center and in the heart of all things, and falsehood is external. Falsehood therefore must be forced to yield up fact and truth. And when one penetrates through the shell of falsehood to where truth lies and

> Truth, displayed i' the point, flashes forth everywhere
> I' the circle, manifest to soul, though hid from sense,
> And no obstruction more affects this confidence,—
> When faith is ripe for sight,—why, reasonably, then
> Comes the great clearing up;—

for truth then in this great clearing up shall appear only the more radiant and heavenly for having been so intermixed with and encased in falsehood. An important item in Browning's optimism is the fact that he believed that falsehood is an appearance, while truth is a reality, and that the former must be of some ultimate service to the latter. Thus temptation, doubt, and falsehood are conditional existences for our souls to exercise themselves upon and grow strong; and all our immature instincts, unsure purposes, thoughts unrealized in action, escaped fancies, all of which at their best represent but beginnings in this life, are to be added unto us in the final estimate of our soul's worth. Life is thus an endless addition, extension, and expansion, and the will is to exercise itself not in the way of restraint and self-control but in such a way as to attain to the greatest possible gain; not negatively but positively, always positively.

[12] "Fifine at the Fair."

II

In this conception of life no doubt the crucial problem is the problem of the indulgence of the senses and the passions. Is it not true, after all, that the greater and more substantial gain comes by means of restraint and self-control rather than by the way of additions, expansions, and free indulgence? Browning's answer to this question is unique and forceful, whatever else one may think of it. It must be granted, first of all, that sense and passion are in us for use, that they are, in fact, the chief powers in us that give life its significance. A man is, for instance, to use his eyes to see and his ears to hear, and a man who has no passion for home nor country, no passion for the traditional past nor the living present, has certainly at best but a very low and meagre existence, whatever other attainments he may have.

The real and significant problem then is: What is the greatest capacity to which sense and passion can attain? Under what conditions can the fullest capacity of the senses be obtained without detrimental results? The senses can attain to their fullest capacity when the soul is most energetic in spiritualizing their activities. That is, the senses are most free to indulge themselves when they are polarized by the power of the soul, for they can then indulge themselves rightly. The eye can see best physically when the heart feels most spiritually; and also conversely, the heart can feel most spiritually when the eye sees best physically. The will power of the soul acts upon the body and saves it from destruction. The will power of the body acts upon the energies of the soul and saves it to the uses of this world. The greater capacity of the soul increases the ca-

pacity of the body and the greater capacity of the body increases the capacity of the soul, and by the power of will the whole being faces forward and there is constant expansion and no need of restraint. The negations of the decalogue, restraint, are superseded by the positive forces of "power, love, and will." Man is to be a thoroughly healthy and exceedingly live animal, and a powerfully quickening spirit that aspires up to God. The red-blue blood is to tingle through one's whole being and dilate the whole soul:

> Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
> The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
> Of the plunge in a pool's living water.....
> How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
> All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy![13]

And the soul on the other hand is to energize and spiritualize the whole body of sense:

> Rejoice that man is hurled
> From change to change unceasingly,
> His soul's wings never furled![14]

The soul carries the body from change to change and thus

> All good things
> Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul![15]

Therefore man not only "gathers earth's whole good into his arms," but heaven's good also, for if he try to pack the infinite into the finite he shall finally

[13] "Saul."
[14] "James Lee's Wife."
[15] "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

be with God in his heaven, one of the elect soldier-saints who

> Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
> Since, the end of life being manifest,
> He had burned his way thro' the world to this.[16]

But woe betide the soul that does not keep the equilibrium of animal activities and soul aspirations, that renounces either earth or heaven. To the one who renounces heaven for the mere beauty and power of this world, the terrible and stern decree is:

> Thou art shut
> Out of the heaven of spirit; glut
> Thy sense upon the world; 'tis thine
> Forever—take it![17]

And the one who renounces, while living in this world, the things of sense and the associations of this life is equally condemned, as, for instance, Sordello who, in his striving for infinite power, forgot the earthly conditions of this life and became too pale and feverish and ghost-like for this world or the next:

> And thus bereft,
> Sleep and forget, Sordello! In effect
> He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect
> Not utterly companionless.

When the senses and passions are aroused, flesh and spirit glorifying each other, and the crisis of life is at hand, the soul is doomed if it does not make its choice according to its highest impulse, even though at odds with the slipshod and superficial conventions of society. This is shown in the poems "Youth and Art" and the "Statue and the Bust" and in many another poem of Browning.

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[16] "The Statue and the Bust."
[17] "Easter Day."

And this failure to will mightily and act positively at the bidding of both the soul and the flesh is really the only condemnable act in life; but it is severly condemnable. It is an irredeemable tragedy, worse than death.

But when one wills mightily and acts positively at the bidding of the soul and the flesh, one's whole being is instantly ennobled, transformed in the very act, enlarged and forever glorified. The action may, indeed, result directly in tragedy, but it is still a success with misfortune in this life but with greater gain in another life:

> Make the low nature better by your throes!
> Give earth yourself, go up for gain above![18]

The very heart of the "Ring and the Book" is the fact that Caponsacchi and Pompilia by choosing to follow their higher impulses at the risk of their lives, are thereby intsantly ennobled, made spiritually free, and are forever justified in the hearts of those who hear their story. Browning exhausts all the powers of his art to give Guido and conventional society free and full power to do their worst, and at the same time to show that this hero and heroine are not merely lifted above the suspicion of guilt, but are, by the very acts of passion and devotion that aroused that suspicion, transformed, ennobled, saved to a higher life.

Now, the flesh represents the lowest parts of our experience and the soul the highest parts. They represent the extremes, the poles, of our being. There is a mid-region in our being made up of the prudential, intellectual and logical faculties of our natures. It is the "What knows" in us, as explained in "A Death in the Desert." But Browning, contrary to all popular conceptions of him, scarcely ever appeals to this phase of our natures. He

[18] "James Lee's Wife."

irradiates it indeed with glory and light from the power of the flesh below it and the power of the soul above it; but he seldom appeals to it for its own sake. "Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also." And Browning's heart lies in the regions of the flesh and the soul. Let us save, Browning would say, the remote ends of our lives to good and gainful purposes, and the mid-region of the intellect will take care of itself. Thus he dips downward into the primitive freshness of physical and bodily activities and penetrates upward into soul aspirations and soul experiences, and draws matter together into an equilibrium from these two diverse sources. And the power by which this is done may be called the power of will, or energy; and the tension produced in our being by the living power of the soul in the flesh and of the flesh in the soul may be termed, using the word in a broad sense, passion. And when the will makes this passion to expand itself and face forward in gathering the goods of earth and heaven we have the program for life—a perfectly simple and comprehensible program, which is to produce constant additions and gains to self and to make forever for more abundant life.

But the conditions of a great soul are that it have high passions compounded of sense and spirit and that it have the power of willingness to press forward and to take the greatest risks. These obvious demands on the part of a great soul either in literature or in life seem to have escaped the notice of some critics who study Browning ostensibly for philosophical purposes. In his essay on Browning, entitled "The Poetry of Barbarism," Professor Santyana, in the interest of what he calls "intelligence" and "contemplation," is sorely grieved because Browning draws the hero of "In a Gondola" as one that has enough passion and will and energy to be willing and even

happy to die for the sake of love; and he incidentally holds the poet up to scorn because he makes another character in another drama, in explaining to his mistress the motive of his faithful services as a minister of the queen, say:

> She thinks there was more cause
> In love of power, high fame, pure loyalty?
> Perhaps she fancies men wear out their lives
> Chasing such shades.....
> I worked because I want you with my soul.[19]

Our critic admits that Browning never allows the passion to sink into sensuality and that in his hands it always remains passion. What offends him in particular is that the passion does not rise into contemplation and that the hero of "In a Gondola" is not intelligent enough to know that it is not absolutely necessary for him to die. "But had that hero known how to love better and had he had enough spirit to dominate his love, he might perhaps have been able to carry away the better part of it and to say that he could not die." This demand on the part of our critic for prudence and rationality in the passion of love, the demand that lovers in tragic drama turn philosophers, is rather exasperating, to say the least. One might as well expect a soldier in the midst of battle suddenly to leave his post as he bethought himself on the fundamental truth that peace is better than war. One might as well expect Othello to sue for divorce and obtain an honorable release from wedlock. Could not Othello have foreseen that his decision to kill Desdemona would involve his own ruin and destruction, granting even that the representations of Iago were absolutely true? We might say, then, with our critic that had Othello only "had enough spirit

[19] "In a Balcony."

to dominate his love he might perhaps have been able to carry away the better part of it and to say that he could not die." And one wonders what our critic really means by insisting that the poet should have thrust prudence, rationalization, and contemplation into the tragic scene of "In a Gondola." Characters like Othello and this hero of Browning take no thought of death. They hold their own lives at a penny-worth price. They are filled with high passion, breaking the barriers of common prudence, and with the energy of will daring the utmost and taking the greatest risks.

A poet who would treat such characters successfully must not be measured by rule of thumb. He must be granted liberties. It is the prerogative of the great to take liberties, if they only take them in a great way. Shakespeare took liberties, and for many generations he was accounted a barbarian, especially by those of the prudential and philosophical type. They considered his poetry the "fruit of the imagination of an intoxicated savage." But in the course of time it dawned on them that Shakespeare took his liberties in a great way, and he was thenceforth considered a genius and a gentleman instead of a barbarian. It ought to begin to dawn upon the minds of men, one thinks, that Browning took his liberties in a great way and that he too is a genius and a gentleman instead of a barbarian.

Again, a great poet bids fair to be immortal,—that is, to be read and known for all time. But to reach all races and all times he must touch the springs of being that have their sources deep in our primal natures, the central and permanent qualities of man, the passion, for instance, of love in its original and primitive strength. And Browning has indeed done well to strike deep into our primitive natures, to give us characters that dare to

love in the old-fashioned way, that dare to die for love if need be, and that sing their experience in impassioned verse, as does the hero of "In a Gondola."

There is also a criticism to the effect that Browning's passionate and strenuous characters have no deep sense of self-denial, of renunciation, and of dependence on a Higher Being, and that Browning himself mistakes self-indulgence for self-realization. There may be some truth in this contention, but the point has been over-emphasized. For the principle of expansion, as Browning uses it, works in two directions. The more one wills to do the more one is aware of and feels dependent on a power outside himself. The old man in "Rabbi Ben Ezra" strives and learns and dares, welcomes the rebuffs of life, rejoices he is allied to that which doth provide and not partake, starts out once more on adventures brave and new, and is not afraid. Yet this man most deeply feels that our times are in God's hand, that amid the changes of this earth his own "soul and God stand sure," that he is in constant need of an infinite power:

> But I need, now as then,
> Thee, God, who mouldest men.

However strenuous Browning's characters may be, they are almost universally deeply religious in the sense of being dependent upon powers vastly greater than themselves.

And from this standpoint again, Browning is justified in his attitude toward external nature and the forces outside himself. For when a character feels rising up from within a well-spring of passionate and volitional life he will ascribe some of this life to the external universe, and the source of it to a Life outside himself that is greater than he. And this Life may be literally and verily there.

Thus, in the poem, "Saul," David, rushing out into the darkness after the great moment in which he aroused King Saul from his lethargy and proclaimed the new law of Love, felt that the whole universe was beating with emotion in harmony with his own; and that there was a power outside himself that was aiding him:

> I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.
> There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to right,
> Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware:
> I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as struggligly there,
> As a runner beset by the populace famished for news—
> Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with her crews;
> And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot
> Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted not,
> For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed
> All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,
> Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.

The external universe may be as mechanical and impersonal as Tennyson said it was, but when life and love and passion and power are in the heart and are "by the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss," then the external universe itself becomes pliable and plastic and

> God is seen God
> In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.[20]

[20] "Saul."

Some critics have said that Browning rarely attributes emotions to the stars and makes God commingle with the activities of the external universe itself, and that generally he speaks of the external universe as existing independently. But the essential point here to seize is that, whether the external universe be conceived as a piece of machinery to give the soul its bent, or as a screen which is to hide God's effluence from us somewhat, or as being such a piece of machinery or screen, the spirit of God shines through it and seems to commingle with it,—whatever way it be conceived, the point to seize is that David's moment of experience in this poem of "Saul" was an exceptional one and that to Browning the external universe itself is never a fixed thing but something flexible and plastic to the influence of conscious beings—God and man.

The external universe may indeed be conceived as the habit of God in reflex and mechanical action. There is ordinarily not much consciousness of any sort in it, but God can renew his consciousness in it at will. Just as a man may keep throwing a ball in a purely reflexive and unconscious manner and as he may, on the other hand, become thoroughly alive in mind and body in the throwing of the ball, so God who usually represents the mechanical side of his acts in the external universe may in favorable moments renew his ancient rapture and intenser life in it:

> The lark
> Soars up and up, shivering for very joy;
> Afar the ocean sleeps; white fishing-gulls
> Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe
> Of nested limpets; savage creatures seek
> Their loves in wood and plain—and God renews
> His ancient rapture.[21]

[21] "Paracelsus."

Likewise in "By the Fireside" the powers were at play in the forests at the propitious moment and mingled two souls together:

> The forests had done it; there they stood;
> We caught for a moment the powers at play;
> They had mingled us so, for once and good,
> Their work was done—we might go or stay,
> They relapsed to their ancient mood.

And man in his higher moments can also renew his own raptures on the hither side of the external universe. In fact, it is man and not the outward and visible world that God himself is primarily interested in, and it is God and not his outward works that man is primarily interested in; and when man's own deeds glorify himself, as in David's case, his own face shines through to God and God's face shines through to him, and the world between becomes an iridescent medium. The outer world, moreover, always receives its significance from the fact that God's face shines from behind it and through it, that the life in the world seems to be walled about with disgrace until God's smile is seen shining through a human face:

> Such a starved bank of moss
> Till, that May-morn,
> Blue ran the flash across:
> Violets were born!
>
> Sky—what a scowl of cloud
> Till, near and far,
> Ray on ray split the shroud:
> Splendid, a star!
>
> World—how it walled about
> Life with disgrace
> Till God's own smile came out:
> That was thy face![22]

[22] "The Two Poets of Croisic."

CHAPTER XI

BROWNING: FREEDOM AND TRANSCENDENTALISM.

I

We have now seen that Browning laid great stress on the power of free choice in the soul, the self-directing, creative, and expansive power of it; that he held that if a man can only take the right attitude toward life, in which all the activities of body and mind and soul are employed, there need be no restraint laid on these activities; and that by the principle of gain life may be made a process of constant growth, addition, and expansion. But a deeper and more fundamental principle than any of these—a principle closely bound up with these in their practical working, a principle which finds the fullest and most frequent statement everywhere in Browning's poetry,—is the principle of the incompleteness of the world and the imperfections of man. It is the purpose here in particular to point out, what seems never to have been clearly pointed out before, the relation this principle has to the principle of the freedom of the will. Why does Browning everywhere in his poetry never tire of inveighing against the "finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark," and of constantly insisting on the facts that "a man's reach should exceed his grasp" and that on the

earth are "the broken arcs," if it is not that, outside of the suggestions of immortality which they contain, they suggest that this universe is not a *block* universe and its system not a closed system; that this world is not so absolutely fixed and predestined in its existence as it has heretofore seemed, but is hung together more or less loosely with many possiblities of improvement, and that man with his power to repeat "God's process in man's due degree" and with his resuscitating and creating powers is a co-partner with God and is mightily responsible for the future wellbeing and final winding up of the world?

In his remarkable book on "Pragmatism," Professor William James says: "Suppose that the world's author put the case to you before creation, saying: 'I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each several agent does its own "level best." I offer you the chance of taking part in such a world. It's safety, you see, is unwarranted. It is a real adventure, with real danger, yet it may win through. It is a social scheme of co-operative work genuinely to be done. Will you join the procession? Will you trust yourself and trust the other agents enough to face the risk?'.....There is a healthy-minded buoyancy in most of us which such a universe would exacly fit. We would therefore accept the offer.....It would be just like the world we practically live in; and loyalty to our old nurse Nature would forbid us to say no. The world proposed would seem 'rational' to us in the most living way." Had Professor James had Browning's conception of a rational world in mind he could not have described that conception more accurately, for Browning believed that the world we live in is just such an unfinished and im-

perfect world as Professor James describes, a world hanging in the balance and depending for its salvation on whether men will do their 'level best' in pulling it through. Even the external world of nature is full of these imperfections and gross misfits. When Childe Roland turned aside into that ominous tract which hides the Dark Tower he found

> Now blotches rankling, colored gay and grim,
> Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
> Broke into moss or substances like boils;
> Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
> Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
> Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

But in spite of the grotesque and terrifying objects that lay in this ominous tract Childe Roland did his 'level best' to find the Tower. He found it, and blew his slug-horn as a token of his victory. Similar misfits, incongruities, and improbabilities exist in the essence of a man's religious faith:

> So, I would rest content
> With a mere probability,
> But, probable; the chance must lie
> Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,
> So long as there be just enough
> To pin my faith to, though it hap
> Only at points: from gap to gap
> One hangs up a huge curtain so,
> Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
> Foldless and flat along the wall.
> What care I if some interval
> Of life less plainly may depend
> On God? I'd hang there to the end.[1]

All the way in life from the blotches and patches of the scrubby things of external nature to the wrinkled

[1] "Easter Day."

folds in one's religious faith there is much that is incongruous, imperfect, and unfinished. To enforce an instance from the passage just quoted, our faith is vital only in spots; in other spots it is quite dry and arid. Some parts of our experience seem to depend directly on God; others only probably. Only so much of our faith as has been made vital is really worth while. And it is made vital by what the soul does, for the "soul declares itself" by "the thing it does." Browning's realism is well shown here. He will call the dead parts of faith dead and not live, even at the risk of making the whole of it look scrappy and incomplete. And when the dry husks of faith are thus shorn away by this insistent realism, then there is really free play. Then the soul can go on vitalizing itself by its acts; it can increase the vitality of those parts of its faith that are already vital; it can then grow and dilate and expand, as Browning said that it can. Professor James again has a passage to this same effect: "our acts, our turning places, where we seem to ourselves to make ourselves and grow, are the parts of the world to which we are the closest, the parts of which our knowledge is the most intimate and complete. Why should we not take them at their face-value? Why may they not be the actual turning-places and growing places which they seem to be, of the world—why not the workshop of being, where we catch fact in the making, so that nowhere may the world grow in any other kind of way than this?" The conditions are that the world be imperfect and unfinished, full of open gaps and wrinkled folds, that man be a copartner with God in straightening it out and moving it forward, that he be really in "the workshop of being, where we catch fact in the making," that he mimic creation and add self to self as Browning says; then there is something like genuine freedom in this life, for man's

acts have power to vitalize and expand life and truth; and they add something to the sum total of existence. This is bracing, indeed.

In fact the world can easily be conceived as being too nearly fixed in its state, based on too exact laws, like the laws of geometry, to permit any free play in its several parts, and to encroach on real freedom. In the poem "Easter Day" an imaginary speaker is made to say:

> I would fain
> Conceive of the Creator's reign
> As based upon exacter laws
> Than creatures build by with applause.
> In all God's acts—(as Plato cries
> He doth)—he should geometrize.

"I see," interrupts the poet himself at this point:

> You would grow as a natural tree,
> Stand as a rock, soar up like fire.
> The world is so perfect and entire,
> Quite above faith, so right and fit!
> Go there, walk up and down in it!
> No.

Indeed no! Browning does not choose to walk up and down in so smug and perfect and finished a little world where everything occurs with geometrical precision and exactness. For what is a man more than a tree or a rock if the universe executes itself in him with the same preciseness and mechanical exactness as it seems to do in these objects? If man have the power to aspire upward to heaven and to wish to escape the gulf of "infernal laughter,"

> Shall Man, such step within his endeavor,
> Man's face, have no more play and action
> Than joy which is crystallized forever,
> Or grief, an eternal petrifaction?[2]

[2] "Old Pictures in Florence."

A world of geometrical precision, of crystallized joy, and of petrified grief is not the world to be chosen to walk in.

Yet to walk in a world opposite from this is not easy but very difficult. It was not ease, however, that Browning was seeking; it was freedom. And it is hard to live in a world not perfect nor entire, in a world of uncertainties, dangers and risks. "It is hard," as Browning says, "to be a Christian." One must be willing to pay the price that freedom demands. It is hard, however, to see just what the price is, and how freedom can be obtained at all. In this same poem of "Easter Day" Browning puts the difficulty point blank:

> And certainly you name the point
> Whereon all turns: for could you joint
> This flexile finite life once tight
> Into the fixed and infinite,
> You, safe inside, would spurn what's out,
> With carelessness enough, no doubt—
> Would spurn mere life: but when time brings
> To their next stage your reasonings,
> Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
> Nor see the path so well, I think.

How this flexible and finite world can fit tightly into the fixed and finished—this is the central and crucial problem and does indeed make one's eyes wink and fail to see the path clearly.

And thus we come full circle to the problem toward which the discussion on Tennyson gravitated. Tennyson said that a large part of this universe of existence, say three-fourths of it, is in a state of permanence and fixedness. The other fourth, which is the all-important margin—the inner life of man—is free, based on the principle of miracle. This was Tennyson's explanation of man's freedom and his mediation between fact and faith. But

Browning struck a far deeper blow for liberty. In his opposition to scientific materialism and fixedness in general, Browning, roused like a lion in his lair, came forward to assert with all the strength that was in him that man in his highest moments becomes aware that all the postulates of geometrical fixedness and determinism can be made pliable and plastic, that the whole world is malleable as though it were just in the process of making, that man who is a "God though in the germ" has no mean but a free and independent part in making it; and that the imperfections in man and the gaps and terrible misfits in the external world which produce groanings unutterable, the incompleteness without and within man, prove positively that he has plenty of free play for the exercise of his god-like gifts, and that the soul has a vast deal to accomplish here below. The shortcomings, then, of this life and of this world are not fatal things in themselves but are the one means of offering a great possiblity to man—the possibility of endless improvement on them and saving them to higher things. There is, of course, an ingrained tendency in us to sink in the scale—to become "finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark." But this is death to the soul. Dauntless courage and high emprise alone can save us from *that*. Man must accept this life strenuously and robustiously. He must be willing and anxious to take great risks and to bear the suspense of uncertainties. Vast alternatives lie before him. It requires the energy of will to attain the higher alternative:

> Let a man contend to the uttermost
> For his life's set prize, be it what it will![8]

In this direction lies salvation, and, without being a Browningite, one may well ask, what other way is there? And

[8] "The Statue and the Bust."

when a soul has chosen the better part and contended to the uttermost, it is secure against all powers whatsoever, because for it forever

> God's in his heaven—
> All's right with the world![4]

Broadly speaking, the difference in spirit between ancient civilization in general and Greek civilization in particular on the one hand, and modern civilization on the other, is that whereas the ancients had a keen sense of Nemesis, of an inexorable fate, of determinism, of fatalism running through all things, men of modern civilization have a keen sense of free-will and freedom, the sense that truth rises from within and that the soul is master of its own fate. In the scientific movement, however, of the nineteenth century and of the present, with its endless classifications and tabulations, with its minute analytical processes, with its vast increase of geometrical exactness and completeness, there has been a strong tendency to emphasize the spirit of fatalism of the ancients; yet the counter-tendency toward freedom has been and is a growing tendency. Out of all the fatalistic philosophies of the ancients, out of the very heart of ancient civilization there rose one figure, stalwart, vast, colossal, superhuman in its dimensions, that cried the deepest cry of the human soul and expressed its deepest need: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" and *"Whosoever will* shall drink of the water of life freely," declaring once for all the soul's worth and asserting its supreme power of making its own free choice. Out of the heart of the nineteenth century civilization there rose a figure, stalwart and

[4] "Pippa Passes."

vast, that struck ringing blows for the soul's worth and the soul's freedom on the new and modern basis of the world's incompleteness and man's imperfections. And perhaps since the days of Christ there has been no one who has more persistently and dauntlessly asserted the energy and power and freedom and central importance of the soul of man than has Robert Browning.

Having this deep affinity with the religion of Christ it is but natural that Browning should have directly accepted the person of Christ in his personal religion and should have made one of his characters in a poem say to another:

> 'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
> In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
> A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
> Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand
> Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand.[5]

And that he should have in his own person spoken of the Face of Christ that grows upon one rather than vanishes, of

> That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
> Or decomposes but to recompose,
> Become my universe that feels and knows![6]

[5] "Saul."

[6] "Epilogue to Dramatis Personæ."

II

Browning's idea of truth is of a piece with his idea of will and freedom, and it is at once realistic and transcendental. Browning practiced the same realism on truth as he did on faith. As some parts of our faith are more vital and other parts less vital and some dead, and as we must pare away the less vital and dead at the risk of incompleteness, so truth to us is truth only to the degree that it has been vitalized by our experience. Truth is a term almost synonymous with experience. Browning's idea of it is in open conflict with Clough's famous lines:

> It fortifies my soul to know
> That, though I perish, Truth is so.[7]

Browning does not deny that there may be an objective standard of truth, but what he insists on in particular is that truth in order to be live truth must have an experiencer, one who practices it; otherwise truth is dead and barren:

> Whom do you count the worst man upon earth?
> Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more
> Of what right is, than arrives at birth
> In the best man's acts that we bow before:
> This last knows better—true, but my fact is,
> 'Tis one thing to know, and another to practice.
> And thence I conclude that the real God-function
> Is to furnish a motive and an injunction
> For practicing what we know already.[8]

Truth is vitalized by practicing what we know; the "soul declares itself" by 'the thing it does"—let this never be forgotten; it is only by experienceing it that truth has any practical worth; we are constantly in the act of mak-

[7] "It Fortifies My Soul to Know."
[8] "Christmas Eve."

ing truth; and the real God-function is to furnish a motive to practice what we already know, to make truth alive by practice.

But motives lie in the heart and in the feelings, and it is by the dictates and demands of the heart that we determine what we will have our truth to be:

> The human heart's best; you prefer
> Making that prove the minister
> To truth; you prove its wants and needs,
> And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
> Meet these most aptly,—resolute
> That faith plucks such substantial fruit
> Wherever these two correspond.[8]

It is the heart—its wants and needs, its hopes and fears —that is the selecting agent in vitalizing truth; an agent in whose selections and directions we are to put absolute faith. "Talk of logic and necessity and categories and the absolute and the contents of the whole philosophical machine-shop as you will, the only *real* reason I can think of why anything should ever come is that *some one wishes it to be here.* It is *demanded,* demanded, it may be, to give relief to no matter how small a fraction of the world's mass. This is *living reason,* and compared with it material causes and logical necessities are spectral things."[9] The heart indeed is best. Its wishes and demands come nearer to living reason and living truth than "logic and necessity and categories and the absolute." Intuitive truth is far more vital than logical truth. In attempting to describe on the witness stand the way in which a new and important truth came to him, one of Browning's characters in "The Ring and the Book" says:

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[8] "Easter Day."

[9] William James, "Pragmatism."

"Thought?" nay Sirs, what shall follow was not thought:
I have thought sometimes, and thought long and hard.
I have stood before, gone round a serious thing,
Tasked my whole mind to touch and clasp it close,
As I stretch forth my arm to touch this bar,
God and Man, and what duty I owe both,—
I dare to say I have confronted these
In thought: but no such faculty helped here.
I put forth no thought,—powerless, all that night
I paced the city: it was the first Spring.
By the invasion I lay passive to,
In rushed new things, the old were rapt away.[10]

Thus the heart can intuitively arrive at a conclusion—a new and satisfying truth—which logic miserably fails to reach at all.

Browning, moreover, completely reverses the conception that truth is to be acquired from without, and makes the truth to proceed outward from an inmost center within us. This is a central position with Browning, and is in full harmony with the conception that the soul of man is free and creative, self-directing and self-developing, independent of heredity and environment:

There is an inmost center in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception—which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and, *to know,*
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendor may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.[11]

But truth is also and in far fuller measure in the Heart of God:

[10] Caponsacchi.
[11] "Paracelsus."

The truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:
Though he is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in his image to witness him.[12]

And when we try to express the idea of these two passages in one, that is, when we attempt to draw the center of truth in God into harmony with the center of truth in ourselves, we get the following:

Truth inside, and outside, truth also; and between
Each, falsehood that is change, as truth is permanence.
The individual soul works through the shows of sense,
(Which, ever proving false, still promise to be true)
Up to an outer soul as individual too;
And, through the fleeting, lives to die into the fixed,
And reach at length, 'God, man, or both together mixed."[13]

And God's very Self thus comes so near to our self that

He glows above
With scarce an intervention, presses close
And palpitatingly, his soul o'er ours."[14]

And this reminds us of Wordsworth and the truth of mysticism, for the heart of mysticism lies in the effort of a man to put himself at once at the center of his own being and at the center of God's being and make those two centers, not imaginatively, but actually, identical. And this is what Browning attempts to do in these passages. Yet Browning is not strictly speaking a mystic. He is characteristically Browning and not Wordsworth. The last three passages quoted are exceptional rather than typical, and throughout his poetry as a whole Browning is far less concerned about the mystic union of God and man than about the nature of man himself. Though man aspires up to God with boundless aspiration, yet he keeps

[12] "Christmas Eve."
[13] Fifine at the Fair."
[14] "Luria."

his own identity intact. He remains flesh and blood all the while. It is not the whole of the infinite that interests Browning but just so much of the infinite as can be crammed and packed into finite man. So Browning may be called, if distinction in terms may be made, a transcendentalist rather than a mystic; a transcendentalist, first, because for him the basis of truth lies in our inner intuitions, passions, and volitions rather than in logical categories, and secondly, because he concerns himself mainly with these same intuitions and passions and volitions, their nature and their development, rather than with the mystic union of God with man.

The differences between transcendentalism and mysticism are on the surface and in the intonations of the words. There are no fundamental differences between them. They are both born of the will. They are both characterized by intensity and innerness. Mysticism is generally reserved to express the greater degree of intensity and innerness. Transcendentalism remains within the bounds of the articulate, while mysticism tends to hover about the points where speech drops into silence. Transcendentalism concerns itself with man's inner life of passions and volitions, while mysticism is concerned with the union of this inner life with the life of God. Transcendentalism emphasizes the present and looks toward the future, while mysticism has a passion for the past. Mysticism, however, annuls the past by transcending time, and lives in the present. Transcendentalism may be called realistic mysticism.

Browning's mystical tendencies, which we have termed transcendentalism, take two directions. Far more interesting than the mystic union of God and man, is the union of soul with soul and the soul of man with the soul of Christ who was an earthly character. And these two

things are profoundly characteristic of Browning. They show his strong sense of realism. The characters of men and the character of Christ are tangible objects, and one can deal with them in a tangible way. Browning always insists on dealing with objects tangibly and on calling things by their right names. He insists on calling a passion a passion and not something else, a dead feeling a dead one and a quickened feeling a quickened one, no matter what radical or liberal conclusion this resolute realism may lead to. But however realistically one may deal with the intuitions, passions, and wills of men, these qualities are forever the substance of idealism and transcendentalism. We may say, then, that Browning dealt realistically with transcendental matter; and no doubt this statement is very near the truth in spite of its being a paradox.

Truth is not only actualized experience, and from within and intuitive, but it is highly personal and transcendental. Each person's truth is different from every other person's, just as each person is different from every other person. "Never," says Browning, "shall I believe any two souls were made similar:"

> Take the least man of all mankind, as I;
> Look at his head and heart, find how and why
> He differs from his fellows utterly.[15]

As man differs utterly from his fellows, so his truth, vitalized in his experience, differs likewise. What is truth to one may be darkness to another. Thus in the poem "My Star" this is most beautifully enforced:

[15] "Epilogue to Dramatis Personæ."

All that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue;
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Thus truth is intensely personal and depends for its disclosure upon the experiencer.

But, however much man differs from his fellows and however much one man's truth differs from another's, souls need each other here below in love and friendship and must possess each other. In this direction truth, in its greatest power, lies, for here man has his deepest and most vital experiences. Love is better than statesmanship, soldiership, poetry, sculpture, or music, Browning tells us in "The Last Ride Together;" it is truly the greatest thing in the world. "Love is best," emphatically. It cannot be doubted that the attraction which souls here in the flesh have for each other was the deepest of all the deep and varied interests of Browning.

These experiences of soul union are highly intuitional and mystical and are, at their deepest, utterly beyond the power of words. Science and philosophy can express many truths of life that point toward the inner core of experience. Poetry can strike an attitude of mind and render an experience that comes far nearer the inner core of experience than that which science and philosophy can render. But the inner experience of soul attrac-

tion goes far beyond the power of poetry to communicate. Every creature can boast two soul-sides, one open to the world and communicable, the other open only to love and incommunicable:

> God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
> Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
> One to show a woman when he loves her!
>
> This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
> This to you—yourself my moon of poets!
> Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,
> Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
> There, in turn I stand with them and praise you—
> Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
> But the best is when I glide from out them,
> Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
> Come out on the other side, the novel
> Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
> Where I hush and bless myself with silence.[16]

It is easy enough to give praise to a poetess. Any one may "dare to phrase it," but that is the world's side of her. When, however, one is in love with a poetess and crosses a step or two of dubious twilight and feels the spell of silent silver lights and darks undreamed of it is far better for one to hush and bless himself with silence:

> Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
> Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
> Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
> Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom![16]

Browning indeed sang it in his brain, in his experience, but not in his poetry, for the deepest experience of love is inarticulate. And Browning never attempted to give utterance to the inarticulate. The heart can never unlock itself fully. Nor even did Shakespeare unlock his heart:

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[16] "One Word More."

'With this same key [Sonnet]
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,' once more!
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he![17]

Now, love, which is intensely personal and which is the deepest essence of truth, is also the essence of the life of Christ, for Christ

Himself conceived of life as love,
Conceived of love as what must enter in,
Fill up, make one with his each soul he loved.[18]

And since love is the deepest essence of truth and since Christ conceived of life as love and entered into mystic union with "each soul he loved," it can be conceived that

The acknowledgement of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.[18]

These are the words of the dying John in the Desert, but they harmonize with Browning's own words about the Face of Christ which never vanishes but grows, and has, Browning says,

Become my universe that feels and knows!

Browning's religion was neither traditional nor orthodox. It was highly individualistic. The two fundamental principles of the soul—Love and Power—Christ realized to the full in his life. Browning arbitrarily but enthusiastically seized upon these principles and made them his own. He had no deep sense of sin and of the necessity of redemption. He consequently did not make much of the principle of redemption, which plays such an important part in traditional and orthodox Chris-

[17] "House."
[18] "A Death in the Desert."

tianity. But he felt the deepest affinity with the person of Christ through the agency of Love and Power, and made these fundamental soul elements the basis of his religion.

Man thus is the measure of all things terrestial for Browning. With him we are plunged into the world within; but we find it a very large world indeed, a world of deep and inexhaustible well springs of life, of imprisoned splendors, pent up, ready to burst out as in a deluge and escape, "radiance vast, to be elicited ray by ray," "new dreamed energies," "power and love and will" with an "unmeasured thirst for good," intuitions, passions and volitions, vast and boundless. This world is also large enough to contain many and great imperfections. Immature instincts, unsure purposes, embryonic thoughts, escaped fancies, foolish dreams—these are all inextricably mixed up with the other soul goods and give them plenty of work to do and plenty of free play. And truth to Browning is just so much of these forces, mature or immature, sure or unsure, embryonic or otherwise, as get themselves realized in experience. Truth may be defined as the amount of work which the soul does, the additions to being that it makes, the expansions and the dilations. Truth is defined in the terms—abundant life and freedom.

What are Browning's ideas of God and immortality? They are just what we would naturally expect after having examined his ideas of truth and freedom. There is through the whole of his poetry a continual and passionate insistence on faith in immortality and the need of God in the soul, accompanied by vague and indefinite notions as to the conditions of immortality and the nature of God. The mere fact that the heart passionately demands immortality is abundant reason to believe that

it is to have immortality. This is a *living reason* and ought to be convincing. Passion and love, energy and power, are such good things in themselves that they ought to continue forever, so that this world cannot be the "be all and end all" of life. The more that a man feels that he is a "God though in the germ" and the more he is at the same time conscious of vast imperfections, the more he will demand another world than this for the full realization of himself. Besides, those souls that have chosen worthily and loved passionately but have, on account of unfortunate circumstances or ill-fitted environment, failed here in love and achievement, as for instance, the speaker in "Evelyn Hope," may possess themselves in patience and look to another world for the things they missed on earth. Again, the imperfections of this life certainly suggest beginnings of a larger life to be carried on otherwise:

> On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round.

And thus God and immortality are abundantly assured to the soul.

On the vagueness and indefiniteness of Browning's notions of God and immortality much might be said, but the statements here must be brief. From such poems as "Evelyn Hope" and "The Last Ride Together" it is not very certain whether in heaven the immortals are given in marriage or are not given in marriage; and this is eminently typical of all that Browning has to offer on the subject of immortality as a state for the blessed. In like manner God is sometimes conceived as the all-complete, infinite perfection, and as never changing, and sometimes again as in a state, like ourselves, of realizing his own possibilities. God is indeed omnipotent, omnipresent, and

omniscient, and yet man may possibly "worst e'en the Giver in one gift" and "o'ertake God's own speed in the one way of love." Though from the dread Sabaoth "stream the worlds, life and nature," yet man's own aspirations and imperfections and sacrifices may contain something that arouses the jealousy of the Divine Mind. And thus the contradictions of indefiniteness run.

Let us take, for instance, the problem heretofore mentioned as the crucial problem, how the flexible finite can be tightly fitted into the fixed and infinite. What is Browning's solution of it? His solution consists mainly in substituting something else for it and ignoring the problem proper. That is, he insists on the flexibility and changeableness of the finite and concerns himself little with the fixedness of the infinite. The infinite as a whole is uninteresting; only so much of it is interesting as can be actualized in finite experience. In fact, such terms as the fixed, infinite, neverchanging law, the absolute, predestination, are little more than so many names to Browning. They do not make for freedom. They are not vitalized in his experience and therefore are no living truth to him. Browning would say it is enough to know that the world here and now is imperfect, changeable, flexible, malleable and flowing, and that man's soul forever yearns up to God, that man is free and that he can exercise his love and power and will, his resuscitating and regenerating powers, in moulding the world and in determining his own destiny. And beyond that—"With God be the rest:"

> Enough now, if the Right
> And Good and Infinite
> Be named here.[19]

[19] "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

Browning thus takes a genuinely realistic, flesh and blood attitude toward things finite, flexible, and incomplete, but a very colorless attitude toward things fixed and rigid, the unchangeableness of law. And the reason for it is plain. One who insists on the idea that every man "differs utterly from his fellows," that each one's truth and each one's God is materially different from that of his fellows, and that each individual is endowed with something like the God-creating power of adding self to self, is driven, by strict logic at least, to hold something of a pluralistic rather than a monistic view of the universe, that there are creative energies in the world independent of each other. This is the logic of the situation, and if Browning were a technical philosopher he would have to take some such position. But Browning is not a technical philosopher and does not follow the strict logic of the situation. His intuitions and imagination teach him otherwise, and he always takes the monistic view. Yet the sum total of things which involve one Faith, one never-changing Law, and one God, are feebly dealt with by him. Feebly because the greatness and absolute diversity of gifts which he generously distributes to so many creatures give him a weak hold on the entirety, the wholeness, and the unity of all things. Browning's system, if we may use such a dry word in this place, is decidedly an *open* system where there is great room for endless expansion and freedom; and expansion and freedom are the things for which he pre-eminently stands.

The best parts about any great poet's system, as far as he has any such thing, is that it is not only inarticulate but that it is open. This is necessary in order to give free play to the poet's creative energy. Wordsworth's system was especially an open system; but Browning's was more decidedly so. Browning, like all poets, was in

love with existence, but existence in the concrete, and concrete objects that seem free and independent. And these free and concrete objects of the universe are so various in kind and infinite in number that they will not fall into any closed or complete system. The fundamental ideas of system are unity, harmony of parts, likeness of pattern, and a fixed principle lying underneath and running through all. And against this idea of fixed principle freedom rebels. Browning's "all's love, yet all's law" means mainly that all's love and freedom. It means the indulgence of

> Every instinct of the soul
> There where law, life, joy, impulse, are one thing![20]—

which is pronounced to be "the ultimate angels' law." Browning has by no means shown how the flexible finite fits into the fixed infinite. How such diverse things as good and evil can exist in the same universe and have their source in the same author, how impersonal law and personal freedom, how predestination and free-will, how fixedness and flexibility can ever be harmonized in a world of fact,—these problems have not been solved by Browning. We should not expect him, nor any other poet, to solve them. We should expect him to take a characteristic attitude toward them; and a characteristic and consistent attitude Browning has taken. Every man, be he philosopher, poet, or practical man of affairs, takes, consciously or unconsciously, an attitude toward them. We are hoping they may be solved sometime in the future. The race does not despair of such things. But it is enough in these pages to know that however weakly he dealt with

[20] "A Death in the Desert."

the unity and sum total of things, Robert Browning has given by far the most powerful exposition in modern times of the soul's individual worth and power, and of man's boundless energy and freedom. *

* See Note 7, Appendix.

CHAPTER XII

BROWNING: ART AND LIBERALISM.

Browning was a liberal in art as well as in his philosophy of life. He was not satisfied with the conventional forms of art and proceeded to create new forms. He was dissatisfied with the usual metrical schemes for poems and experimented with new meters. He was daring in the use of phraseology that is heard in common speech and that is often near the improper. He took liberties with sentence construction by suppressing the less important words for the sake of condensation, and by collocating words in unusual ways. He was a liberal in introducing commonplace associations of life into his poetry and bringing in concrete imagery that is not traditionally considered beautiful.

Though his work shows irregularities and sometimes unpardonable license, the main effect of it has been to show the variety of uses to which our metrical system can be put, to enlarge the range of the English language in expression, to give wider scope to the use of concrete objects in poetry, to make poetry approximate more nearly to the real and detailed things of life than has been supposed to be possible, and to save to poetry such things as pins, axes, crowbars, umbrellas, creaking pianos, blind horses, and ragged thistle-stalks, with which some of our most common and sometimes deepest affections are associated.

This realistic attitude in Browning toward things actual is matched only by his transcendental attitude toward those same things. It is only when they can be set to the music of life that they are of value. It is only when they can be made to associate with a life that is filled with passion and power that they become significant. It is only when this life itself can be made to expand and dilate that it can be saved to art and to truth. Poetry is the art by which we give a new and higher evaluation to both the outer and inner life of things. The finite everywhere,—and the finite of Browning always means something very realistic and often something very homely,—must partake of the infinite. It must be filled with the power and glory of heaven, like Boehme's rose, celebrated in the verse of some stout John of Halberstadt:

> He with a 'look you!' vents a brace of rhymes,
> And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
> Over us, under, round us every side, . . .
> Buries us with a glory, young once more,
> Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.[1]

This way of conceiving a thing at once as actual and ideal, realistic and transcendental, of exercising the seeing eye upon it with great definiteness, and yet perceiving in it inexhaustible life and beauty without allowing it to lose its identity one whit—this is an absolute requisite for great art. Let great art be realistic if it pleases, (and it is often terribly realistic in no juggling sense of that term, more truly than the art that calls itself realistic), but it must also be creative and idealizing. There is no contradiction in the seeming paradox that it can be at

[1] "Transcendentalism."

once the most realistic and the most transcendental. It has a hunger for facts and also for new idealizations. And it is large enough to represent in itself a great deal of both. It is really dilating and expansive, for it possesses abundant life. There perhaps has never been an actual human character in the Anglo-Saxon race, unless it were Shakespeare himself, with as full a life of power and will and passion as, say, the character, Othello. So that though this character makes an impression on us of actuality, of flesh and blood qualities, he impresses us too as having something additional, the created energy and power the artist gave him—something more than fact.

But the largeness of mould into which great art casts its characters and the passion and will and freedom which it displays and the liberty it takes confound the prudent and the wise. It shatters their little matter-of-fact systems to pieces. Dying for love, and happily too, as some of Browning's characters do, seems in the eyes of these persons an outrage to humanity. No doubt the smug and learned pharisee was astounded beyond all measure at the extraordinary liberties the Teacher took who first uttered the words "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you," etc., for this seemed to reach the extreme limit of imprudence and to be against all tradition and convention. No doubt the prudential and the compromising have little sympathy for poor Desdemona in the play who blessed him that cursed her and who meekly submitted to her fate and died for love without as much as raising a hand to assert her rights and dignity as a woman. No doubt prim makers of systems feel like clenching their teeth at such similar perversions of their

systems as are implied in the following suggestions of Browning on the secret of becoming a master of men:

> Resolve, for first step, to discard
> Nine-tenths of what you are! To make, you must be marred,—
> To raise your race, must stoop,—to teach them aught, must learn
> Ignorance, meet halfway what most you hope to spurn
> I' the sequel.....So may you master men.[2]

To brush aside traditions and conventions, to assert the maxims of the simple which confound the wise, to insist on stooping in order to rise, to penetrate through the show of things into things themselves, to reach the original sources of life and love and to find life and love in abundant overflow, to live for love rather than for fame, to will mightily to die for love if need be—these are the paradoxical but inspiring ideals of the masters of life and of men. It is first eminently worth while to become thoroughly alive—alive in body and brain and mind and soul, and then to accept cheerfully the consequences that this kind of living may bring. Alive in two senses—in the common, practical sense of living and in the idealistic creative sense, which is dilating and expansive. And to meet these latter and higher demands of life the artist is constantly impelled, as Wordsworth said, to create intuitions and passions and volitions in the universe where he does not find them. And in the interest of more abundant life, Browning is a grand fulfillment of the statement of Wordsworth. By the sheer power and intensity of passion and will Wordsworth in his best moments penetrated the hearts of men and the universe more deeply perhaps than Browning ever did.

[2] "Fifine at the Fair."

But his penetration was intensive rather than broadly universal, and in this sense he himself is the best fulfillment of his own statement. Yet Wordsworth's great moments were comparatively few, and the restraints he placed on life in many directions prevented the forces of sense and passion from bursting forth into energy and power in any flood-tide in his poetry. Browning, on the other hand, with greater sustained energy, with his principle of flesh and soul equilibrium, and his principle of gain and expansion, made the pent up intuitions and passions and volitions of the soul dilate with energy and power that have something of Shakespearean magnitude about them. Browning was a genuine liberal in art.

But this full flood-tide of passion and energy in Browning is precisely what alienates some critics. They say he has no reticence, no reserve, that his imagination does not exercise a selective power in repressing the ugly and seizing the beautiful, and that his style is too profuse to show any economy of attention. Such criticism tends to obscure the issue. For what is the state of the case with Browning? Look at the long series of dramatic monologues like "Saul," "Cleon," "Abt Vogler," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "My Last Duchess," etc., and find anywhere in literature from a single hand an equal amount of poetic matter condensed into so narrow a space. It may be said that these poems are the very quintessence of economized expression. Of the dramatic monologue Professor E. Johnson writes: "The introduction of a second person acting powerfully upon the speaker throughout, draws the latter forth into a more complete and varied expression of his mind. The silent person in the background, who may be all the time master of the situation, supplies a powerful stimulus to the imagination." This condensed art form, which is a favorite with Browning,

furnishes an offset to the fulness of life of his characters. Browning's own art ideal is expressed in Andrea's description of art in "Andrea del Sarto:"

> Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
> Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
> Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
> Above and through his art—for it gives way.

To fill a form so full of expanding life that the life in it tends to reach above and through the form and make the form itself give way—this is Browning's ideal of art.

And when this ideal is attained, as it frequently is in Browning, it insures to us three of the most satisfying and enduring qualities of style—imaginative force, expressiveness, vitality. Such qualities of style we find in their highest form in, for example, "Saul." The wild joys of physical living, the vast aspirations arising from a noble willingness to do and die for another, the engendering powers of spiritual love, the shaking of the very heavens themselves with this new instrument of love—these powers, vividly conjured up from the infinite depths of life and compressed within the narrow compass of the poem, give a powerful stimulus to the imagination, demand and attain a wonderful expressiveness from the language itself, and make the poem deeply vital throughout. The tension produced between the swelling life within and the form in which it is contained makes the poem sensitive and alive at every point. It gives the poem life, individuality, independent existence, makes of it a creation—a creation that can take care of itself in this world as well as can any other created thing upon which has been bestowed the gift of life.

The dramatic monologue of Browning achieves compression, expressiveness, and vitality in another way.

Browning is not concerned with the whole life history of a soul. There are all kinds of experiences that are barren in their influence on character, and these are passed over in silence. There are others that are fruitful. They may be trivial, but they are significant. The fruitful and significant experiences, chiefly those associated with the mind in a state of excitement, or those connected with a central and critical experience of the character, are seized upon and rendered in the monologue. Browning seizes his character at a point where he can watch the inner "play and action" of his mind, where he "catches fact in the making," where he can press close to the character's inner experience, where he can see back over his character's earlier career and see what former experiences cast their shadows on the present, where he can take a look into his character's future and get glimpses of what is to be. It is precisely at that *nexus* where thought enters into action that we receive a flashlight of personality, a revelation of human motive and conduct. It is there that we get the deepest insight into human character. And Browning, working in this deeper stratum of human nature, flashes forth in vivid and expressive language the wonders he has seen.

Though Browning is not interested in the whole life history of his character, he is interested in the whole of his character's experience at the point from which he has chosen to view it. He tries to render the whole of the single experience, and this fact explains the subtilty and complexity of Browning's art. A single example must suffice. In "Andrea del Sarto" where Andrea is criticising Rafael's painting, Andrea says:

> That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
> A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
> Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,

> He means right—that, a child may understand.
> Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
> But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
> Out of me, out of me!

It must be remembered that Andrea is under the stress of excitement. It is a serious situation he is confronting with his wife, and it is of great moment that he persuade her. In this condition, his mind becomes conscious, as any mind would, of everything—important and unimportant, momentous and trivial. He sees the fault in the arm at one instant, and in the same instant he sees that the soul is right. Swiftly his mind turns again to the faulty arm and back once more to the soul of the picture. He sees everything at once and tries to express everything at once. And the swift movement of mind that Browning displays in rendering not a part but the whole of a character's experience at a given time, has earned for Browning the fame of an analytical thinker. But note what the thinking consists in. There is to be rendered, first, not a logical proposition, but a personality under the stress of excitement. Andrea is distinctly not a proposition but a character in a critical emotional and volitional state. Secondly, the so called analysis is not made abstractly but concretely. First the arm, then the soul, and then "the insight and the stretch!" What a fine metaphor in the word "stretch!" And this is the poetry of insight, not of logical and scientific thought. And this is the way, not of intellectual analysis, but of poetic representation. The result is concentrated, expressive, vital poetry.

When a character is under the stress of excitement and is facing a serious situation he not only is conscious of all the trivial and momentous things connected with

his experiences and career, but he also is conscious of his own imperfections and his own soul freedom. He feels that he is overwhelmingly unable to cope with the situation confronting him; yet he feels a free moral power within himself that makes him worthy to overcome. And this fact of human nature furnishes Browning with a lesson in art as well as a lesson in morals. Browning preferred early Italian art to Greek art because the former gives a sense of man's strivings and imperfections and a sense of man's spiritual freedom, while the latter does not. After observing the strength and rounded beauty of Greek statues in "Old Pictures in Florence," he says,

> Growth came when, looking your last on them all,
> You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
> And cried with a start—What if we so small
> Be greater and grander the while than they?
> Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature?
> In both, of such lower types are we
> Precisely because of our wider nature;
> For time, theirs—ours, for eternity.
>
> To-day's brief passion limits their range;
> It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
> They are perfect—how else? they shall never change:
> We are faulty—why not? we have time in store.
> The Artificer's hand is not arrested
> With us; we are rough-hewn, nowise polished:
> They stand for our copy, and, once invested
> With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.
>
> 'Tis a life-long toil till our lump be leaven—
> The better! What's come to perfection perishes.
> Things learned on earth, we shall practice in heaven!
> Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.
> Thyself shalt afford the example, Giotto!

> Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,
> Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?) "O!"
> Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

In the opening of this poem the poet one warm March day "looked over the aloed arch of the villa-gate" that confronted the valley where Florence lay out on the Mountain-side, and said that

> Of all I saw and of all I praised,
> The most to praise and the best to see,
> Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised:
> But why did it more than startle me?

What more than startled him was the fact that although Giotto had finished a smaller work, he had here planned so magnificently that he could not finish what he had planned, and that this unfinished work was higher and greater than the finished. And in the same way when the poet thinks of the finish and the perfection of Greek statues he cries "with a start—What if we so small be greater and grander the while than they?" and then asks whether Man "shall have no more play and action than joy which is crystallized forever, or grief, an eternal patrifaction?" It was not crystallized joy and petrified grief, as represented in Greek art, that Browning wanted, but it was play and action, freedom! and a sense of the eternal. So he gives the early Italian painters their "guerdon and glory for daring so much, before they well did it," and for giving man, through their art, a sense of imperfection and a sense of freedom.

But can this principle of imperfection and of freedom be applied to the making of a poem? Is it worth while to plan a poem, as Giotto did his bell-tower, so magnificently that it cannot be completed? Is it true that a poem may, in its formal elements, be "rough-hewn and no wise

polished" and still be art? These questions are too large to be answered in full here, but a few things may be said about them. Granting, for the sake of the argument, what has already been implied, that there exists an antithesis between form and content in poetry, we may say that the principle in question may be measurably applied to form. Take "Old Pictures in Florence," for instance. The main theme embodied concretely in the unfinished bell-tower is stated in the beginning, the middle, and the end of the poem. The details from the old pictures in Florence amplify the main theme of the poem. The stream of thought in the poem flows through a well-defined and unmistakable channel. Yet the borders of the stream are "rough-hewn," and the stream is constantly threatening to overflow its banks. It has the power to make and to modify its own channel, well-defined as that may be. The content of a poem must have power to break through and mould its form at will. We are here easily deceived by words. Forms at their best are but imperfect. Harmony and symmetry are but relative things. "Paradise Lost" has harmonious numbers, but could it have been possible for any one to make it harmoniously symmetrical throughout? Are there not great irregularities in "King Lear?" For the sake of bringing the "invisible full into play," does it not let the symmetrically "visible go to the dogs?" The engendering and torrential passion and energy of the play constantly break through the boundaries of imperfect form, enlarge the truth without violating it, and reveal an art higher than the merely visible. This, or something like this, was the faith and, in a measure, the practice of our great modern liberal in art.

If it is not impossible to convince men that the principle of imperfection and of freedom can be applied to the

formal elements of a poem, it ought to be possible to convince them that it can be applied to the contents of a poem. The universal feeling of our imperfections and the universal sense of our spiritual freedom when we betake ourselves to the deeper levels of our being, ought to be a sufficient guarantee of truth for the highest poetic representations. But we will let Browning's superb half-men, his Andreas and Cleons and Norberts and the rest, with their aspirations and imperfections, their god-like powers and unsure purposes, their faiths diversified by doubts, with their half-free souls aspiring to be more free, answer for themselves. These characters, better than any others in literature, give us the sense both of man's spiritual shortcomings and of man's spiritual freedom.

CONCLUSION

In an essay on "Reflex Action and Theism" Professor William James, to whose teachings the spirit of these pages owes not a little, writes as follows: "From its first dawn to its highest actual attainments, we find that the cognitive faculty, where it appears to exist at all, appears but as one element in an organic mental whole, and as a minister to higher mental powers,—the powers of will..... It is probable that to the end of time our power of moral and volitional response to the nature of things will be the deepest organ of communication therewith we shall ever possess..... Certain it is that the acutest theories, the greatest intellectual power, the most elaborate education, are a sheer mockery when, as it often happens, they feed mean motives and a nerveless will. And it is equally certain that a resolute moral energy, no matter how inarticulate and unequipped with learning its owner may be, extorts from us a respect we should never pay were we not satisfied that the essential root of human personality lay there." These are fitly spoken words; and are the simple truth. The fact is that the essential root of human personality lies in the will. It is the exercise of this power that makes us men and God-like. It is this power that we rely upon and draw from all the days of our lives. It is the power by which we can make or mar the beauty or worth of our daily living, in the lowly walks of life, or in the highest walks of life. It is the power by which we face and select alternatives

and so far determine our destiny. We have had alternatives before us as children and shall have them the last days of our lives; and thus we constantly exercise our wills. The power of will is the central power of personality.

And passion, if it takes on the form of love, filial, or parental, or conjugal love, love for home, or country, or friends; if it takes on the form of devotion, devotion to a cause, a principle, or truth, or right; if it is deep-seated and not shallow, central and not peripheral, subdued and not hysterical, and if it is under the central power of the will, passion is one of the worthiest elements of our natures. It is the element that gives zest, meaning, tone, color, and substance to life. It is the second great power of personality. There are two things we have with us always—our passions and our wills.

And poetry, more than science or philosophy, poetry, which ever keeps its ear close to the common heart of humanity and its common joys and sorrows, its choices and failures, its choices and successes, enshrines these experiences in the substance of its work. It awakens and purifies the passions; it arouses and nerves the will. And great poetry, which is great art and creative, enlarges the volume of passion and will and energy in created characters, and effects through pity and terror the purifying of our passions and the strengthening of our wills.

Morley finely says of Wordsworth: "The trait that really places Wordsworth on an eminence above his poetic contemporaries, and ranks him, as the ages are likely to rank him, on a line just short of the greatest of all time, is his direct appeal to will and conduct." A similar trait, the appeal to will and a sense of freedom in man, also ranks Browning, as the ages are likely to rank him, just short

of the greatest of all time. And Tennyson, according to the gifts that were given him, sang nobly and well of

> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.[1]

Moreover, the fact of moral responsibility rests directly on the fact of volitional and spiritual freedom. Moral responsibility is exactly commensurate with moral freedom, and both have their roots in the will. Since freedom and responsibility arise from the same source in our natures aestheticians can never successfully separate freedom in art from the responsibility which the fact of freedom entails. Wordsworth and Tennyson and Browning respectively took their share of responsibilities commensurate with the moral and spiritual freedom to which they had attained. Each came as a teacher as well as a singer to his generation. Each took the plain man's view that a man is as responsible for what he says in poetry as for any other act of life. Each held that of the aesthetic strain and the moral strain in human nature the latter is the deeper seated and that the former must be grounded in the latter. It cannot be doubted that the steady moral purpose which characterizes the efforts of these poets helps to account for the large and substantial output of work of each, and gives their works a solidity that sets them apart from the works of the rest of the English poets of the nineteenth century.

But it may be urged that the sense of moral responsibility in these poets forced them to give expression to moral platitudes that are detrimental to poetry. It must be admitted that such is the case in their less happy moments. Should they, then, have attempted to lessen or

[1] "Ulysses."

override their sense of moral responsibility? Certainly not. Such a course savors distinctly of shallowness and insincerity. Out of weakness these poets, in their happier moments, perfected strength,—the strength of volition. For their volition, when intensive and penetrative, and sustained by passion, produced a strain of spiritual freedom and moral sublimity, a vision of a higher wisdom, in their poetry, which never could have been produced had they not had a deep sense of moral responsibility.

Wherever the will is vigorously exercised there is always a healthy glow of life. There is reformation, growth, and expansion. Where it is not vigorously exercised there is lethargy, retrogression, and degeneration. There come times in the history of the race as in the life of an individual when lassitude, relaxation, and retrogression seem natural and inevitable. But they are seasons that do not abide with us any great length of time. They are perhaps only seed time for a greater harvest. At any rate, the tide soon turns toward the strenuous and arduous and high enterprise, for it is in this direction that salvation lies; and the call of our greater poets is not in vain.

But if the social conditions are normal, as the tide rises and men act courageously and feel the strength of their wills, they feel inevitably the need of a higher will than theirs. This need is felt increasingly at the same ratio that the strength of will is felt increasingly. When a man enacts the greatest power of self-direction, he manifests the strongest spirit of self-surrender; when he becomes the most conscious of his own actual and individual power he becomes the most conscious of inexplicable and indefinable powers within him and around him and above him.. Thus in his highest experiences he exercises complete self-direction and absolute self-

surrender at one and the same moment. This is a paradox, but one of the deepest and truest paradoxes of life.

When, in this paradoxical state of self-direction and self-surrender, the will does its work intensely and inwardly, it makes a man "aware of his life's flow," aware of his own soul's passion and freedom. He then experiences the power and freedom of creating, and the joy of living. He becomes a creative artist, with a divine function.

But this intense and inner experience of the will and the passions, giving as it does a sense of freedom to the soul, is the fountain head of the great poetry of all ages. The experience is always transcendental and, in its intenser moments, always mystical. Though the spirit of transcendentalism and mysticism is often disregarded by the lesser poets, it is universally cultivated by the greater poets as the source of their highest inspiration. This spirit is the soul's assurance of freedom, and the love of spiritual freedom is as old as the race. This love is the prime desire of all races. It inspired the Hebrew prophet and the Greek rhapsodist; it inspired the blind Milton and the greater of our modern poets. Wordsworth, the mystic, found the universe and the soul of man filled with the power of spiritual energy and freedom. Browning, the transcendentalist, found that in the wills and passions of men there was free and creative power enough to build new worlds. And Tennyson, though cautious and critical and strongly influenced by the idea of impersonal law, still found that life would not be worth living if one could not believe that the soul of man is free and immortal. This main miracle of our lives, this mystical and transcendental experience of spiritual freedom, is necessary to all the higher inspirations of poetry.

The transcendentalism and mysticism the world cares for and will not let die is that which grips and moves the mind. The chief power of the mind which it affects is the will. Its mysteriousness is ineffective if it does not touch the will. The pure transcendentalism of Shelley, for example, has all the good qualities that transcendentalism in poetry can possess, save one. The abstract mysteriousness of Shelley has no force on the will. It lacks grasp and convincing power. For this reason the poetry most characteristic of him will always be the poetry for the select few. The mysterious, on the other hand, in Wordsworth, or in Tennyson, or in Browning, connects itself deeply with the volitions of the soul. It seizes hold of men not merely because it is mysterious or fascinating but because it forces them to discover themselves on the deeper levels of their being. It unlocks for them their own hidden energies of mind and soul, and makes them aware of the inheritance of spiritual freedom which is theirs. And this is one of the most important functions of poetry.

And it may be added that, since this inner and spiritual freedom is an abiding quality in human nature, poetry, which alone can render it, is a thing of the future as well as of the past and the present. There is nothing inherent in our social progress to destroy the power of poetry. Our social progress may tend to change the outward forms of poetic expression,—may make certain kinds of imagery and certain forms obsolete. But it cannot destroy or change the inner spirit of poetic substance. The spirit of transcendentalism and mysticism is not dead. The sense of spiritual freedom in the race is not weakened. The power of its spiritual energy is not waning. If there be science, it shall fail; if there be

philosophy, it shall fail; fail to express, with intensity and with innerness, the fundamental passions of the heart and volitions of the soul. These always have been and always will be reserved for the great art of poetry. So that poetry is a thing of the future as well as of the past and the present.

Though many minor singers exist in every age and generation, poetic geniuses are rare. There have perhaps not been as many in the world as there have been centuries of human history. If, therefore, we cannot at the present time, point to a great living genius of poetry, let us not suppose he has forever vanished from the earth. It is reasonable to expect that within a century he will be with us again. And when he does come he will find in the hidden forces of man and the world and in the deeps of his own being abundant material for poetic expression. He will find that neither Wordsworth, nor Tennyson, nor Browning, nor any other poet, has exhausted the well springs of moral and spiritual life to which the human mind has access. Let us hope, therefore, that his coming may be soon. Let us hope even that he is already born in our midst, and that we may live to see him vindicate anew the immensity of the future of poetry:

> Ah, that brave
> Bounty of Poets, the only royal race
> That ever was, or will be, in this world!
> They give no gift that bounds itself and ends
> I' the giving and the taking: theirs so breeds
> I' the heart and soul o' the taker, so transmutes
> The man who only was a man before,
> That he grows godlike in his turn, can give—
> He also: share the poets' privilege,
> Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old.[2]

[2] Browning, "Balaustion's Adventure."

APPENDIX

Page 11. Note 1. It is not intended in this book to depreciate the value of emotions in poetry. If the will is the first power of personality certainly the "emotions, chiefly those essential and eternal in the heart" are a close second. But the will and the emotions are complementary to each other, not antagonistic. The will prevents the emotions from becoming maudlin and the emotions prevent the will from becoming sterile. The emotions give tone and color and substance to the will and the will gives dignity and distinction to the emotions; and the two together constitute the most important powers of personality and therefore the chiefest material for poetry.

Page 11. Note 2. It seems that in life, too, as in poetry, the energy of will is a more vital force than intellectual conceptions. Professor Dewey in his Psychology, for instance, says: "There is possible no knowledge without attention. Attention involves the discrimination of sensations from each other, and the identification of some one group of these sensations with self—in short, an act of choice..... The process of knowledge is a process of volition;" and Professor William James, as quoted in this text on page 247, says that the cognitive faculty is but one element in the larger powers of will.

Page 41. Note 3. Perhaps the most favorite words of Wordsworth, especially during the period of his greatest literary production, are the words "motion" and "gleam" with their various adjectival and verbal forms,

together with words of kindred meaning—words at once dynamic and volitional. In addition to the examples given in the text, a few more must suffice:

To cut across the reflex of a star
That fled, and, flying still before me, *gleamed*
Upon the glassy plain.

Even then I felt
Gleams like the flashing of a shield.

And add the *gleam*,
The light that never was, on sea or land.

Lighted by *gleams* of moonlight from the sea
We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.

Now is crossed by *gleam*
Of his own image, by a sunbeam now
And wavering *motions* sent he knows not whence.

Sounds of undistinguishable *motion*—

No motion but the *moving* tide, a breeze—

All the shadowy banks on either side
Came *sweeping* through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of *motion*.

Ye *motions* of delight that haunt the sides
Of the green hills.

From the blessed power that *rolls*
About, below, above.

No *motion* has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Those hallowed and pure *motions* of the sense—

On the first *motion* of a holy thought—

And all the tender *motions* of the soul—

Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting *motion.*

Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal *motion* make
A sound like thunder— everlastingly.

This list might very easily be extended. From it we see that Wordsworth, in a very peculiar sense, attributes vital movement, not only to all the objects of the outer world, but also to the senses, the thoughts, and the soul of man, and even to God. And the mere act of pronouncing repeatedly the words "gleam" and "motion" and "roll" in the sense Wordsworth uses them, gives a healthy and voluntary thrill to the soul.

Page 70. Note 4. The device which the pre-existent idea was to serve was no doubt that of giving largeness of movement to the poem. There is indeed something of epic movement in it. This effect is produced mainly by the device of conceiving the soul as existing in an immeasurable past, coming "in trailing clouds of glory" to the present, and sweeping through the present into the measureless future. This conception produces in the reader a sense of vast movement and a sense of the superiority of the soul over things of time. Any criticism that ignores Wordsworth's explanation and makes more of the pre-existent idea than a poetical device is likely to be unsound.

Page 124. Note 5. To prove that this point is really as important as indicated here one needs only to turn to the testimony of the "Memoir" where Free-will is spoken of as the "main miracle, apparently an act of self-limitation by the Infinite, and yet a revelation by Himself of Himself." "Take away the sense of individual responsibility and men sink into pessimism and madness." etc.

Vol. I, pages 316, 317, etc. Moreover, there are many passages in Tennyson's poetry besides those quoted in this book which emphasize the importance of the point, but the following single passage from Œnone must suffice as illustration:

> My vigor, wedded to thy blood,
> Shall strike within thy pulses, like a God's,
> To push thee forward thro' a life of shocks,
> Dangers, and deeds, until endurance grow
> Sinew'd with action, and the full-grown will,
> Circled thro' all experiences, pure law,
> Commeasure perfect freedom.

That the goddess of wisdom should pronounce this passage adds to its significance. For the end of wisdom is perfect freedom that is attained by the power of endurance and the power of will circling through all experiences.

Page 178. Note 6. This and many other quotations from Browning that follow are taken from his dramatic monologues. It would certainly be wrong to identify the mind of Browning with the minds of some of the speakers in these monologues, as, for instance, the speaker in "My Last Duchess." Yet it seems not to be wrong to quote from such a poem as "Rabbi Ben Ezra" in order to state an attitude of mind of Browning. This difference of selection seems to be determined by two principles of criticism. The first principle is that, as in life we tend to identify a man with his best deeds and his solidest thinking, so in literature we tend to identify the poet with his greatest and noblest characters, or at least, with the finest qualities in such characters. The best part of a poet's mind is bequeathed to his best characters. The second principle is that we tend to identify the mind of a poet with the ideas that recur oftenest in his work as a whole.

We do this not only because they recur but because those that do recur have a vitality about them that makes us feel that they are characteristic of the author. I have tried to use these principles in my citations from Browning's dramatic monologues.

Page 234. Note 7. Since no room was given in the main discussion to Browning's views on political liberty a word may be said about them in this note. His views were individualistic and liberal. They are well summed up in the lines of a poem written in answer to the question, "Why I am a Liberal?"

> But little do or can the best of us:
> That little is achieved through Liberty.
> Who, then, dares hold, emancipated thus,
> His fellow shall continue bound? Not I,
> Who live, love, labor freely, nor discuss
> A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."

This is intensely personal, and one wonders why Browning did not have a greater sympathy for Wordsworth's political patriotism which, too, was intensely personal and at bottom very much like Browning's. What Wordsworth finely says of Milton was true of himself and of Browning:

> Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
> Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free.

For Wordsworth there was one decree "that by the soul only, the Nations shall be great and free." And Browning grounded his sense of political freedom on this same basis.

Wordsworth, however, felt there were many radical and liberal movements that did not contribute to the freedom of the soul; and to such movements he was opposed. Browning, on the other hand, hoped that larger freedom

would result from practically every liberal political movement. Here the differences between the two were so great that the younger poet was unable to appreciate the position of the elder. Wordsworth was a conservative, who believed that movements toward political freedom must be of a fundamental and slow growing sort. Browning was a liberal, who believed that such movements must be aggressive and radical. And Tennyson, whose views have been discussed in their proper place, was a conservative-liberal, who expressed ideas adapted to practical politics.

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